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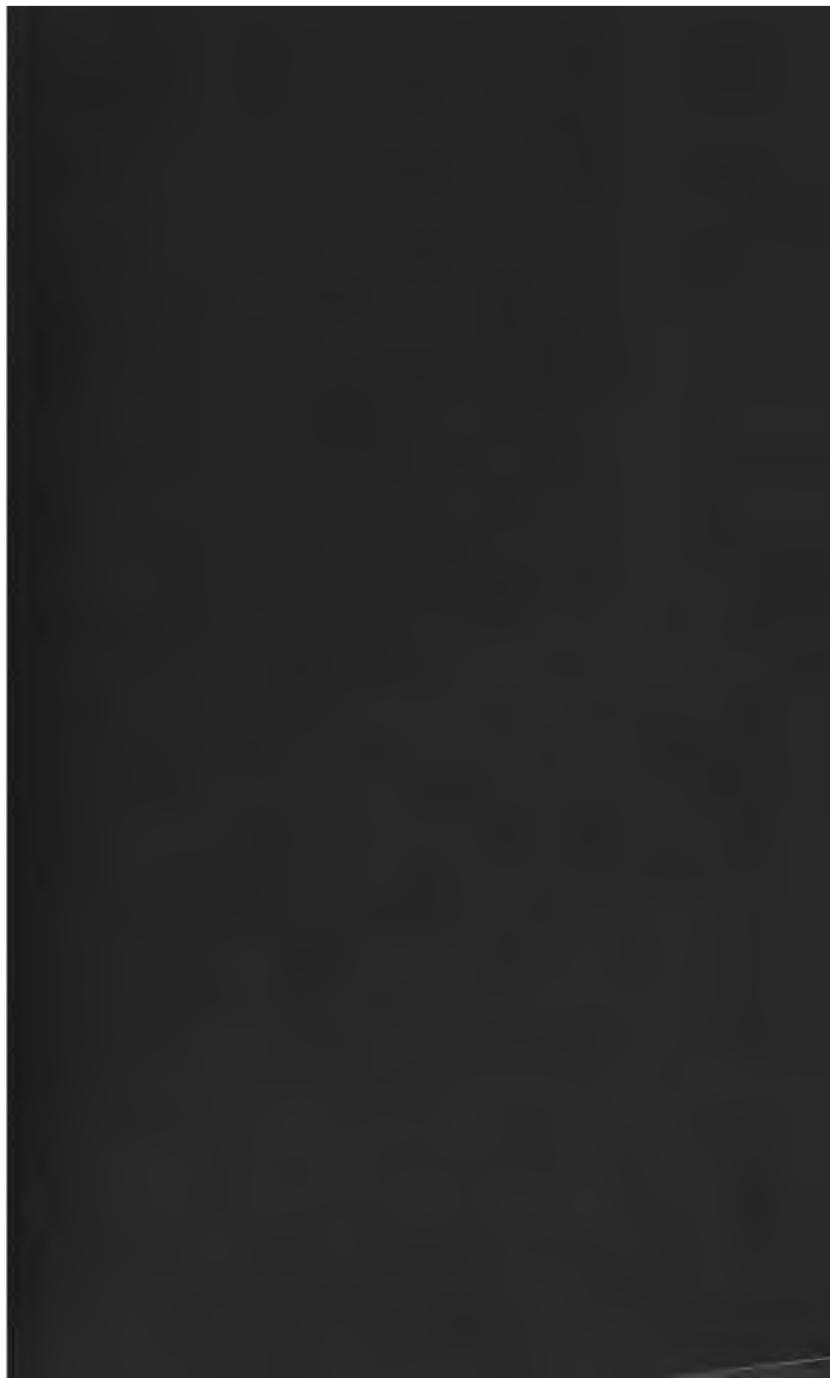
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THE
AGENT OF BROOME WARREN.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
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NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
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THE
AGENT OF BROOME WARREN.

CHAPTER I.

THE few strides before a leap may sometimes attract attention to the style in which we get over it, and create a corresponding interest in our fortunes on the other side, and such, perhaps, may be the effect of a few words of preface on the course of a history. But experiments in cold blood are apt to be dangerous, and we have seen occasions on which it might have been well to remember the admonition to a poor player, to "leave making faces and begin." We therefore commence acquaintance with our fellow traveller through a long journey by expressing a civil hope that he will not find it fatiguing.

Having thus broken the ice and exchanged a few pleasant observations on the land we are leaving, we gradually slide into the subject that most engages our mind, and wonder whether he has ever remarked that amongst the well grown and elegantly got up habitués of Pall Mall and thereabouts, the

prevailing expression is that of some bearded young lion bristling over the poisoned barb of the Hot-tentor.

(Of course, he can never remember to have seen amongst them the blithe sparkling eye, or to have heard the natural accent of mirth so common to the *clans* immediately below them, and supposes that such characteristics are suppressed by the high society in which they move—that happy faces are not compatible with good breeding, and that moody silence and imperturbable features are the most infallible signs of lofty position. We quite agree in his suppositions, and fall into rather a long discussion of why they should be facts; during which we hope his own good breeding will keep him awake.

True content, we think, would be puzzled to put on that suicidal look and stoic indifference to everything that excites an opposite development in the rest of the world; and the young blood that rises like a spring from the mountain top, would be sure enough to rebel against any social engineering that would dam it up in stagnation. We must seek other cause for these clouded brows than incapacity to struggle against the mode of May Fair and the club in St. James's; and if so, what can it be? Why is this handsome young potentate of the peerage, or overgrown gentry, to be seen, from four o'clock to sunset, framed and glazed in his club window like some fine picture that wants the last touch to the corner of the mouth, and the last dot of light to the now expressionless eye? Why does

he stalk the street like his tailor's advertisement, and chronicle his want of thought in lazy articulation that would scarce do credit to a jackdaw ? See him lounging at Tattersall's and making up the only book in his library—does he brighten when he wins, or darken when he loses ? See him lolling by the rails of Rotten Row—does he care one puff of the cigar that takes the colour from his cheek and spoils his appetite, for the fair horse-breaker who wonders what on earth my lord can be thinking about ? She would be very clever if she could find out.

And yet my lord has no want of education to supply him with thoughts, for he ran the gauntlet at Eton, and would have been backed for a "double-first" at Oxford, had he only not happened to be a gentleman commoner at Christ Church, and the fellow student of a class who aspired to honour in the science of doing nothing. It is just this study that overpowers his brain, for the more his capabilities the more his want of some necessity upon which they may be exercised ; some decided purpose and defined occupation to form a starting and a winning-post in the great race of life, and inspire and direct emulation for a creditable place. Without these, our thoroughbred is nowhere, and we may leave him to his own calculation of what he is worth.

No wonder if he and his like have a look of care—it would be a wonder if they had not ; but it does appear remarkable that so many of them have never penetrated the cause of it, or listened to some

one of the ten thousand occasions on which it has been told them. We never knew more than a single sufferer who evinced the slightest suspicion that the world did not go with him quite as Nature meant it should ; and with this exception we propose to extend our acquaintance whilst he looks about for a remedy.

Our friend's name was James Crowley. He was well born and well educated, and, as he was an only son and inherited all the wits of his family—and their wealth into the bargain—the young ladies of the London season used to give a decided opinion that he was very clever. His face and figure would have removed all doubt, had any been entertained, for the first was of the choicest bronze, overshadowed and skirted by a dark forest, of which Mr. Truefit was the ranger, and the latter exhibited five feet eleven inches of as good drawing as we usually find on the walls of the Royal Academy. And then one fair waltzer could not refrain from whispering to another that the nose was perfect Grecian ; and the other would whisper back that the dark eye was just the Helicon that inspired Sappho.

In fact, James Crowley (or Jim Crow, as his familiars and lovely lips, in secret, were accustomed to call him) was undeniably a handsome fellow, and very much the more so from the indolence which had never found it out. His age was about five-and-twenty, but his experience in the world, which means a radius of half-a-mile round the Duke of Wellington's statue in Piccadilly, was great enough

to break him down. He had given up dancing because he had danced with everybody, and he rarely dined out because there they were again. As to falling in love, that was entirely out of the question, for he was unreasonable enough to require a heart at first hand, and where was such a Kohinoor to be found? The juvenile balls had made it unattainable even in the nursery! Life, he said, was a barren wilderness, and the den he dwelt in was the Clarendon Hotel.

All that his compeers did to sustain their energies he had tried over and over again, excepting that he had never tried the resources of Crockford's, which was then in its glory. He had a distaste for gambling, which was thought unaccountable—a weakness which would not suffer him to ruin the peace of mind of those who were not overburthened with it, and an illogical way of reasoning that, such being the case, it would be no great mark of wisdom to risk his own. In other ways he was said to be much too lavish, though his fortune stood sound enough to resist the tide that dispersed many another; and as there was no chance of his being ruined and unable to accommodate a good fellow with a stray hundred or two, he was universally admitted to be a very good fellow himself.

Such was the mode in which he had passed the diplomatic seasons of dowagers and fair attachés ever since he left college. The dog-days were slept out upon the deck of some marvel of a yacht, and the winter in careering over the fences about Melton, or standing sentry in alarming battues for some

distinguished dealer in Leadenhall Market. His indifference made him a good shot, and he rode forward because it was too much trouble to crane.

At last he could bear this waste of days no longer. He felt that he was living for nobody and nothing, and suddenly announced to his club companions, one evening about the end of July, that he had recommended himself a total change, and was going to start the very next morning in search of something new. His resolution was opposed by many doubts of his sanity, but perhaps there might have been individuals elsewhere to pronounce it the wisest he had ever made.

So thoroughly had he been worn out by the world of fashion, that he had taken no sort of consideration about any world he might adopt in place of it, and his course was determined by a letter which chanced to turn up in his hasty packing. It had come some days ago from the only dear relation he had, and this was the Countess of Goldfield, many years his elder, and widow of the lord lieutenant of a county some hundred and odd miles from London. Lord Goldfield had been dead four or five years, leaving a son to inherit the family estate in Yorkshire, and two daughters, who had both been happily married in the early part of the previous season, on which event Lady Goldfield had relinquished her leading station in London life, and betaken herself to the splendid solitude of Golds-worthy Park. It was a tempting direction for his pilgrimage, and he decided upon taking it, though

it involved a visit not quite so tempting, but not to be avoided, on the same road.

When the next nine o'clock express train was screaming for its passengers, and the usual anxious crowd were screaming for their places, would anybody have imagined that the handsome young man who stood so calmly deliberating amongst them, in his well-fitting travelling dress, was no other than our friend James Crowley ! There at nine o'clock ! Could there have been a greater proof of his utter horror of everything he was leaving ?

He seemed to be making up his mind as to which of the carriages would subject him to the least affliction of fellow travellers, when his eye was attracted to the window of the one opposite by the burst of a shrill voice, which very much resembled the sudden disturbance of a hen roost. It was high in disapproval of a porter, who, it appeared, was carrying a basket of ducks topsy-turvy, notwithstanding the public announcement that they were real Aylesburys, and had gained the first prize at the poultry show.

“All right, ma’am,” said the porter, “I’m going to put them in the luggage van.”

But the luggage van was not to be heard of. They always travelled by first class, and so did the beautiful game cock, which had been highly commended, and just been insured for a hundred pounds.

“’Gainst the rules, ma’am,” replied the barbarian swinging the important passenger over his shoulder, in spite of all expostulations, human and gallinaceous, and charging through the amused lookers-on.

But here Crowley proved his better breeding by stepping forward and politely assuring the excited lady that he would see her treasures placed out of danger, and return to make his report.

This was very good-natured, for it was certainly not called for by any remarkable fascination, either personal or decorative. In the latter respect the lady was rather grotesque. She was a mixture of many fashions, all plume and prismatic streamer, with a hey-day twinkle in her eye, not out of keeping with a sharp projecting profile, but very much so with the tell-tale pepper-and-salt of a wild and very youthful coiffure. Fifty odd years are secrets very hard to keep, and frank confession saves a deal of trouble. Upon the whole, this was certainly not quite the companion we should have picked out for our friend's comfort, but it was difficult to know what would suit him best, as nothing had ever suited him yet. That he regarded her with unusual attention was not at all surprising. Perhaps he had been taken by the discovery of something really new.

"How very handsome!" she exclaimed to some one on the seat beyond her. "How polite! how elegant! How much he reminds me of our brilliant visitors in Red Lion Square, before I married and became hum-drum in the country! I should have thought that other gentleman, who was standing by his side, and is now standing by himself, might also have stepped forward in a case so urgent; but he does nothing but look free and easy at this carriage, as if we were intimate acquaintance. I'm

sure I don't know what he can see in me to be so particular. There ! did you see him then ? I admire that, indeed. Ha ! ha !"

The person alluded to had certainly an air of self-sufficiency. He was much over-dressed in a sporting, or flash style, and though not bad-looking, hardly gave the assurance of a true gentleman. He was something under the middle age, but with rather a full and flabby habit, which more than hinted a life of dissipation and not over refined society. Crowley himself had remarked him, and wondered what could keep him stationary on the platform, as he seemed to be neither a new arrival nor a projected traveller, and to belong to no party of either description. Like his fair friend in the carriage, he had noticed a very attentive look in her direction, and imagined them to be acquainted. For some cause or other he had been a little curious on the subject, but he had no time for another look at him when he returned with his promised report, for the bell was sounding, and he was only just soon enough to seat himself in front of the flounces when the train began to move. He had not been excited to such an exercise of gallantry within his recollection, and was almost as much astonished at himself as overwhelmed by the torrent of affability to which he had made himself a victim.

CHAPTER II.

TO say the truth, however, Mr. Crowley had no very particular cause for astonishment, for his civility had not been quite so disinterested as he had made it appear, and might have been altogether ascribed to that other personage in the background. What he had done was by way of making acquaintance, and obtaining something more than a glimpse, for that other was the very loveliest girl he had ever seen in his life. At least, so he had thought, for she had not given him a full view of her dark, downcast eyes, till the train started. At that moment they flashed up in the direction of the person we have noticed as having no object in the bustle, and the thought became a conviction: his first fit of admiration was simultaneous with his first tingle of jealousy. The stranger's eye, however, though it followed them with a cool smile of assurance, conveyed no apparent farewell, and was perhaps only led by the usual interest which attends departing travellers. The flash might have had no meaning in it, and he tried to believe so.

The many-coloured elder lady strove hard to assist

him in forgetting everything but herself. They had hardly passed the first mile before she had given him the history of all that had tempted her to London, and all that was taking her back to the country. How she had made the most distinguished exhibition in the Poultry Show. How that the parentage of her highly commended chanticleer was a deeply interesting mystery. How that he had been presented as an egg to the late Mr. Cantelot, of Leicester Square, and hatched by steam; and how she had taken him by the wing and brought him up morally, and provided for him in the matrimonial way, till the young army of his sons had killed all the cocks, and tempted away all the widows in the parish. Then again there were half-a-dozen ladies of his harem expecting to increase their families, and she was obliged to hasten home to attend them; and then again she had taken all the Aylesburys away from the disconsolate drake, and there was no saying but he might be driven to adopt imprudent habits in the village duck-pond. And here she threw her head back and projected a rather downy chin, and laughed in a manner very knowing and confidential.

Crowley might have found it difficult to reply in a vein satisfactory to both ladies, but the fact was he was sensible of nothing but some necessity for a moral shake of his head, for his faculties of hearing and seeing had been reserved for his younger neighbour exclusively. But she had not spoken a word, or taken her attention a second time from some trifling piece of railway literature.

And here again he found himself a little puzzled. He observed that she never turned over a page, and instead of reading her book, was busied with her own thoughts. That they were not of an ordinary nature was evident from the changing expression of her countenance.

The more he looked the more he wondered at the transparent purity of complexion and the perfect symmetry of her features. The train was carrying him fast towards the land of poesy—wherever that blessed land may be—and he hardly knew whether he was running away from his wits, or only just overtaking them. But we must have a care how we follow him, lest we lose sight of our own, for lofty brows and eyes of blackest blue are dangerous things to think about, and there was once a time when we would willingly have twined a lock of dark chestnut braids to—well, well, it is very long ago, and we hope we are wiser now. What could have been the subject of this young lady's deep study? Had it anything to do with that gentleman we saw on the platform? Nonsense! if they had any knowledge of each other would they not have said farewell?

The only evidence she had given that she sometimes heard the conversation, was a slight blush of vexation, with now and then a tremour over her countenance, as if it were a hard matter to refrain from laughter;—not very surprising considering her laughing years, which did not seem to be more than twenty. But the gleam was momentary, and the shadows were more settled. A lively elastic nature

was evidently pressed down by some influence so weighty, that a struggle seemed only to produce a graver contrast. What could it be? In one so beautiful there might have been excuse for an over-consciousness of self-importance, but this was not the case. Her beauty was the last thing in her thoughts, for never had less pains been taken for adornment. Her dress, indeed, was an emphatic rebuke to the gaudy occupant of the adjoining seat, consisting only of white muslin and a black gossamer scarf, a delicate straw hat being thrown on another seat, in consequence of the summer heat. Her figure might have been called slight by those who estimate attractions by the weight, but it was charmingly rounded, and appeared to be a trifle over the common height.

When would she speak! Would her voice accord with all the rest, or was there yet some stroke of disenchantment? The little straw hat was destined to settle the question. It had been some time trotting towards the edge of the seat, and at last the motion of the carriage sent it over. Crowley picked it up tenderly as he would have touched an air-bubble, and was very solicitous to be assured it had not been crushed.

“Oh, no,” replied such soft tones as he had never heard in his opera box. “It is too light to mind a tumble.”

Mr. Crowley had been “very much alarmed.”

She bowed and smiled. What an expression in those pure and high-bred lips! What a row of treasures they revealed, and what a heart a man

must have possessed if they had not snapped off the best part of it! Could this fair star be a spark from the blazing firework by her side? Quite impossible! At all events the truth of the matter should be arrived at somehow; but whilst the means were in a deep state of puzzle the distant crow of the "highly commended" was heard in the luggage van, and his mistress crowed in response.

"Ah, there's my dear orphan of Leicester Square! He knows he is on the road to his domestic perch, and cannot restrain his spirits. Poor anonymous fellow! how I wish I could give him a name, now that he is so celebrated, to distinguish him from the vulgar plebeians of the—the farm-yard."

And here again she threw back her head and laughed immoderately at some other word which had very nearly escaped her.

"Oh, goodness me! now I think of it, a lady in our village has christened her donkey after a favourite gentleman, and it always brings him to her recollection, you know. It is so pleasant! What shall I call my pet? How I wish you would be his god-father."

"With great pleasure," replied Crowley. "He is perfectly welcome to go halves in all the names I have.—If we put them together, I think they will be very appropriate. Suppose we call him Jim Crow?"

"Charming! The very thing! Jim—what did you say?"

"Jim Crow, aunt," replied the younger lady,

looking up from her book, and now laughing in earnest.

“Aunt!” ejaculated Crowley to himself. “Laud we the gods! not mamma! Aunt by marriage, of course; it could never be by blood. Her uncle must be something very different—though heaven help his taste.”

The firework was going off in a louder key.

“How exquisite! How very clever! How just the thing! How flattered he will be to have half your name, and how he will burn to know the other half! What enquiries he will make of all the cocks and hens in the neighbourhood! My name is Bloomer, and my husband is the vicar of the parish, and this is my niece, Miss Longland; and everybody will be so anxious to hear all about our gifted fellow-traveller, who gave half his name to my favourite. Oh yes, indeed I think so.”

This was rather a strong attempt to examine Mr. Crowley in the first question of the catechism, but he chose to be thought a dunce, and made no satisfactory answer, whilst Miss Longland endeavoured to start another subject. The dunce was much beholden both to the cause and consequence, and, the ice once broken, slid wilfully into that troubled stream which “never did run smooth.”

He had a tact in conversation which, without allowing it to become intrusive, was adroit, when he chose, in leaving no break for its discontinuance; so that the slight observation which had been dropped in his aid in reference to the next station, was naturally followed by a polite question from

one who professed to be a stranger on the line. This could not be answered in less than a whole sentence, during which our friend was opportunely reminded that the scene they were passing was of some importance in history. His listener became more attentive. She had read the passage he mentioned; and then, of course, he ventured a few remarks upon the book, from which the young lady was led on to a diffident admission that she had read a great many more. So had Mr. Jim Crow, who now found his studies highly remunerative, inasmuch as they helped him to the information that she was highly educated. Her parents must be persons of elegant mind and good station. What on earth could have induced them to confide her to such protection?

But Mrs. Bloomer had no fancy for indulging a conversation in which she could neither lead nor follow, and very soon kicked over the traces and pulled the other way.

“Books and histories,” she said, “might be very well for people who could do nothing but read, but if all the world could do nothing better, a pretty world it would be. For her part, she preferred exerting her mind on things that would make her a subject for histories, and a good example for the do-nothings; though for that matter she didn’t know that example ever did much good. She had never followed it herself, and believed nobody else did; and if that was the case, what was the use of history books? The world always did more harm than good, and the least said is the soonest mended.

As for accomplishments, and all that stuff, what was poetry but sham sentimentality that would be still more ridiculous if it were true? What was painting but the ghost of roses and lilies without their scent? What was music but Italian operas which nobody understood, and which made everybody tell falsehoods by pretending they did? What, she would like to know, were such fine things but chaff for admiration, which was not worth the catching? They had no need to set such traps in Mrs. Bloomer's maiden days, when her father was attorney-general, and secretary for the Board of Guardians. All the music they wanted then was 'Off she goes ;' and all the dancing was down the middle and up again, and the business was done."

"I've no doubt of it, Mrs. Bloomer. I'm sure it would have done mine. But I believe the fashions in those days were more adapted for agile displays of grace ; and, of course, you were always in the fashion."

"Oh, of course ; short and scanty—just low enough to—ha! ha! and just high enough to—ha! ha! ha! with a waist just under—don't be inquisitive—and a large bow between the shoulders, and a sash that reached six inches below our petti—never mind! In those days dancers were dancers, and looked as if they could fly, and tabor and pipe couldn't go fast enough, though we had never less than forty or fifty couple to go down. Goodness me! how we used to fan ourselves and our partners behind the door! Dancing was dancing then, and not swimming, as it is now."

“So I have read, Mrs. Bloomer, in an excellent account of the dances at a place called Kirk Allo-way, where the dancing and music were quite of another world.”

“Oh, quite. I used to go to all the grand balls there, and the master of the ceremonies was most polite in bringing me no end of partners. Poor dear old man! I was such a favourite!”

The points and angles which composed the attractions of Mrs. Bloomer betrayed themselves through her elaborate costume quite visibly enough to present a pleasant picture of a half-swathed skeleton, footling it fast and furious with a rampant caco-demon; and as Crowley chanced to turn his eye upon the niece, he could not help discovering that her accomplishments, so emphatically denounced, had been guilty amongst other offences of reading the account in question. The consequence was an irresistible fit of laughter, which Mrs. Bloomer fortunately accredited to her own graphic mode of narration, and the jealousy which at first had some appearance of tartness, took an amiable turn. Perhaps, had she been less intent upon herself, she might have been less satisfied by detecting a certain odd sensation in her admirers that they were, in some sort, involved in a confidential understanding. Nothing could have pleased one of the parties better, though it raised a slight blush in the other, and might have carried us into a fanciful enquiry of whether any circumstance in nature is too minute to produce its little family of consequences. But Mrs. Bloomer began another down

the middle and up again, over our tender shoots of philosophy, and turned us into mere reporters.

“Ah,” she concluded, “those were happy times! The hey-days and may-days before I married Mr. Bloomer and settled in the country to devote my time and advice to the improvement of his niece, poor Lucy. Alas, she has never taken a word of it, and I have now no hope,—which you will agree with me, Mr.—you will agree with me in thinking a great pity, Mr.—Mr.—I beg pardon, I did not quite catch your name?”

“Mr. Crow,” replied Crowley, with a courteous bow, and another tremour on the lips of Miss Longland.

“Ha! ha! I don’t believe that, but I daresay I shall find it on your luggage. Well, I was going to tell you I have taken the greatest pains to communicate my acquirements to Lucy, but all to no purpose, for I am sorry to say she is exclusively devoted to reading and drawing and outlandish languages, which you know are not calculated to make much noise in the world. You would hardly imagine that though she was quite out of her mind to come to London, nothing could persuade her to go to the great poultry show! No, nor a single party of any kind, though we have been living in the midst of fashion, in Diot Street, Bloomsbury, and knew everybody from Kentish Town to the Mansion House. She did nothing in the world but stay at home by herself, and walk about Bloomsbury Square, as if she had lost her wits. What could she have come to town for?”

“I should like to know,” thought Crowley; and his eyes would have made the enquiry, but she was again in her book, and to all appearance determined to hear no more.

“There must,” he again thought, “there really must have been some sort of intelligence between Bloomsbury Square and that fellow on the platform.”

At last Mrs. Bloomer announced their approach to her station, and he was just as much at a loss as ever. Nothing remained but to give up the mystery, or solve it by ill-bred questions, which after all he doubted whether Mrs. Bloomer could answer. He was pretty sure the individual who haunted him was not known to *her*, and still more sure that if he were known to her niece she had reasons for keeping the fact to herself. He gave the matter up, and as common civility demanded a little conversation at parting, after so much in the course of the morning, he tried to make himself agreeable. The travellers in the luggage van being the most interesting topic, he earnestly hoped they had not suffered by the expedition, and would arrive at home as happy as they had been triumphant.

It is surprising what important information we sometimes obtain from the most unexpected sources. Jim Crow and the Aylesburys paid the full amount of their debts to him, and inspired their mistress with another gabble of gratitude, which cleared up all his doubts.

“My dear madam,” he replied, “I only did what anybody else would have done.”

"I beg your pardon, Mr.—Mr.—ah, I must go and look at your luggage ! There was another gentleman who saw my distress before you appeared—but I don't think he *was* a gentleman, for he only looked impertinent and did nothing at all."

Crowley turned his eye quickly upon the younger lady, and observed that she coloured and looked a little haughty, but whether in disapproval of the gentleman or the unfavourable allusion to him, he could not determine.

"I should have interfered much sooner," he observed, "but imagined that gentleman to be an acquaintance, and feared I might be intrusive."

"An acquaintance ! I should think not, indeed !" And a toss of the head made it impossible. But another look at Miss Longland made it quite the contrary. She rose from her seat and looked out for the station in most unequivocal confusion. He had no need to ask questions. They were fully answered. Her object in going to London was to meet that person, and the meeting was clandestine. And so ended his three hours' dream.

When she turned to put on her hat her colour had subsided, and her look was so ingenuous that he felt himself a monster to doubt her prudence. But the case was too plain. Would anybody trust to looks after this ! In spite of his mortification, however, he was most assiduous in assisting her to collect the numerous packages which usually encumber a journey from London, and obtained smiles enough in repayment to wish he had never seen them.

And now the whistle sounded—the pace was slackened to a stand-still—and the two or three porters of a small station bustled backwards and forwards, with a shout about some place, which for aught he could understand might be any other place. The carriage door was unlocked and swung open, the band-boxes were swung out, and out bounced the plumes and streamers to superintend the debarkation from the van.

“By your leave, ma’am ; by your leave.”

“Oh ! they’ve tossed my Aylesburys on their backs !”

“Tickets, ma’am. Tickets—tickets—tickets !”

“And there’s Jim Crow standing on his head !”

“This your luggage, ma’am ? Where to, ma’am ? Want a fly, ma’am ?”

“Stop ! stay ! Leave me alone ! I don’t want anything !” And away Mrs. Bloomer flashed her flounces, followed by a countryfied hobbledehoy, whose sole business seemed to be grinning at his mistress.

“I’m sorry to say farewell,” said Crowley to Miss Longland. “Travellers seldom meet again. Suffer me to see you to your carriage.”

Lucy thanked him with another flitting blush, and he helped her to alight ; holding the little hand as long as he could, and conveying her packages to a carriage in the rear of the station. Having placed them as carefully as he could, he handed her in, and stood looking at her for a moment, as if doubting whether he might enquire to what happy place she was going, for Mrs. Bloomer had forgotten amongst

her many communications, to give him her address. But he seemed, after what he had witnessed, to think better of it, and nothing remained but to say his first and last farewell. Did she seem sorry to part? He rather fancied so, but this was absurd! Her thoughts were on the London platform, and he turned slowly away.

What a creature was casting all her treasures to the winds! Now that he had seen her on her feet, the grace of her figure and its action, appeared almost to exceed the beauty of her face. He should never see her like again!

Seated once more in his lonely train-carriage, he threw a last look at her. She was standing up and regarding the departure with a smile, which he would have conjured into melancholy. Idiot that he was to think so! He bowed another adieu, which was sweetly returned. The engine screamed, and she was out of sight.

CHAPTER III.

THE scene must now change to a wild romantic region, four or five miles from this station. Regarding it from the level ground above, a bold variety of meadow and corn-field and blooming heather, descended and diminished into an endless expanse of golden broom, with the scattered commencement of a vast forest, rolling its dappled hues into a distance of blue and broken hills. In the midst was the square tower of a little church, which told tales of old acquaintance with past generations, when its ancient yew trees furnished bows for the hands which were now a portion of the soil; and not far was a many-gabled parsonage, dodging intrusive eyes behind tottering elms that opened their hearts to a few vagrant sheep and donkeys, and their arms to a numerous settlement of rooks and jackdaws.

Retreating from these, a tumbling zig-zag of cottages staggered about as if they had suffered from the neighbourhood of a tempting invitation to "Man and beast," which occasionally confounded one with the other; though they were, here and

there, admonished by something more respectable, with a patch of lawn and a bed or two of holly-hocks. There was likewise another little building in the centre of a green, where some animated tatters were engaged in games of quoits and cricket, and various acrobatic evolutions. It was rather more defined in its architecture than anything about it, as if from some greater necessity to keep it in repair. It was round and low, and had a peaked roof of red tiles, with a door half wood and half iron bars. Could this be the place "where wicked people go to!" Could this be the retreat of rural indiscretion, where all gave token of untempted simplicity! *Oh, la vertu! où va-t-elle se nicher!*

Half a mile farther was a very considerable mansion, surrounded by a large park, and no doubt the residence of the principal lord of the land. He appeared, however, to be more content with taking his rents than favouring the payers with his company; for the walls had a tinge of neglect, and the windows were shut, like his eyes to the parish wants.

Passing a dilapidated stone bridge over a small stream that bubbled in and out, and almost round about this extra mundane settlement, our Dr. Syntax in search of the picturesque would have found himself on the green before mentioned. If inclined for a stroll he might have been tempted by a narrow and darkly-shaded lane that led towards the forest; but we suspect he would not have travelled far, for a green ditch on either side very broadly

hinted that it led to nothing savoury. At the end of two or three hundred yards he would have been stopped by a rough gate, hanging upon one hinge and opening into a farm-yard, which was by no means a model one.

A pleasant place enough is a farm-yard, *sometimes*. That is, when there is plenty of clean straw, and a stock of drowsy cattle that can eat no more, and cribs well filled, and a sleeping partnership of plethoric porkers beneath them, slumbering in sweet forgetfulness of spareribs and sausages. This is all very pleasant, and so are snug sheltering barns and well swept cart sheds and comfortable stables, and a sleek team in them, never taxed to greater speed than two miles an hour. We have a happy remembrance of the time when we used to filch fishing lines from their long tails, and astound them with the bang of our rusty gun, purchased from the blacksmith with the savings of our pocket-money, and destined to be the death-knell of sparrows and yellow-hammers beyond calculation. Our game-bag has been better filled since those days, but our hearts have never known the same triumphs.

But the farm-yard in question was nothing of this description. The first step you took into it was a squish up to your knee, and the next was a squash up to heaven knows what. The pigs and the cattle had a gaunt and hungry look, as if they had a mind to eat one another; the cribs were broken, and only supplied with rubbish to prolong the pangs of starvation; the barns displayed their rafters through the thatch, and the stabling had

lost boards enough to let in all the coughs and cracked heels that career upon the north wind. Not a yellow-hammer was to be seen, and the few miserable cocks and hens found no reward for their scratching, but the consolation that they were not likely to scratch their way to market.

One side of this quivering quagmire was occupied by the owner's house, an irregular building of yellow plaster, picked out with mire and roofed with mossy tiles. It appeared to have been built, as far as it went, some years ago, but never finished. Spare materials of brick and lime were piled before it, and against it leaned slabs for window and door sills, and ladders and scaffolding, all worn out with watching for better days. Everything about the place proclaimed its proprietor to be either very poor or very penurious, and afforded equal evidence that he had grudged himself a helpmate, for it was quite out of the question that any two heads could have agreed in thinking it habitable.

We have been rather minute in our account of this abode, because the occupant was one of the principal magnates of Broome Warren, the name of the village we have been describing. In the afternoon of the day of Mrs. Bloomer's journey from London he came forth for description himself. He was rather a short and stout built gentleman, with a bull neck and dark square face, remarkable for the heavy determined jaw and projecting forehead; a pair of very small and deeply-imbedded eyes were black as ebony, and squeezed into narrow slits with puckers in the corners, like those of some savage

animal. The mouth had the same character. It seemed to have been wider and to have been stitched up, which gave it a cruel smile, as if the said animal were not to be trusted. The head, as he pulled off a broad-brimmed felt hat, something like a cracknel biscuit, to wipe it with a red cotton handkerchief, was a little bald, but garnished with short black wiry curls which betrayed no touch of time, his age being little upwards of forty-five; a stoop in his walk suggested more, but it was only the stoop of one who is borne down by meditation and not disposed to partnership. His costume was a moleskin shooting jacket, with waistcoat and trowsers to match; the latter very low in the bracing and hanging about his heels in rucks, which made his body much too long for his legs; altogether, his natural gifts, with his own improvements, were not very attractive.

Such, however, were the exterior traits of Mr. Christopher Cheek, agent for the Broome Warren estate, and owner of two or three extensive farms of his own. These he had purchased from time to time with the profits of his employment; and, according to common report, for a small fraction of their value, by taking timely advantage of agricultural distresses, which at that time were of too frequent occurrence. But there was another view of these purchases, said to be adopted and directed by Mr. Cheek himself, which showed him in a light much more amiable, the shadows being thrown upon the luckless vendors, who were charged with improvident habits, bad farming and so forth, which must have sent them to

prison if he had not come forward to assist them. Conflicting rumours were never brought to a compromise, and Mr. Cheek shared the reputation of many other important people, of whom the world decides there is no making head or tail.

He had picked his way round the edges of his farm-yard and scraped his boots upon the gate, from whence he lifted them slowly and heavily along the road to the green—heavily because the rucks of his trowsers incumbered his heels, and slowly because he might have been afraid of dropping his cogitations in a lane that never kept itself clean.

And so he arrived on the green and approached the bridge, from which a pack of idle boys were pelting the gudgeons. As soon as they saw him, they commenced running away, tugging off their caps as they turned their backs, and evincing a fearful consciousness that they had been doing something wrong, though they hardly knew what. Mr. Cheek, be it known, was a great reprobate of idleness, and his terrors were much augmented by the awful fact of his being a Justice of the Peace; a dignity for which he had been thought the fittest person possible, where there happened to be no one else.

“Where'er he gazed a gloom pervaded space,” and the alarm of the little boys was no more than the general feeling of the parish, who were never so remarkable for activity as when they were making room for his worship.

“Hillo! you Jack Rokins and the rest of you,” he shouted, “come here with you.”

The boys slunk back, cowering and cap in hand.

“ You, Tom Dabchick, why ain’t you minding Mrs. Bloomer’s ducks ?”

“ Please, sir, they’re gone to Lunnon.”

“ And you, Jerry Hodges, why ain’t you routing up the nettles in my orchard ? Don’t I give you sixpence a week for it ?”

“ Please, sir, you ain’t never paid me, and father says I shan’t work for nothin’.”

“ Father said so, did he ? I s’pose he had been to the ale-house, for he never goes anywhere else. Tell him if I catch him prowling about my hedges I’ll clap him in the cage — d’ye hear ? and you, Jack Rokins, why don’t your sister Sukey come for the skim milk as she used to do ?”

“ Tain’t my fault, your worship ; she says she ain’t a coming any more.”

“ Not coming any more ? and why not ?”

“ Please your worship,” continued Jack with a grin, “ she says you said summut as she did not like, and——”

“ And what else ?”

“ She says, sir, if ever you speaks to her again she knows some one as ’ll teach your worship better manners.”

Mr. Cheek flourished his black-thorn ; but the enemy were too light for him, and scampered away with a clatter of tongues that gave small hope of amendment. The last words he could distinguish were from the lips of Jerry Hodges, whose father he had threatened with the round-house.

“ Send Dad to the cage, will he ?” said Jerry,

colouring up with fury. "I should like to catch un ! M'hap I may live to see un there hisself some day ! And what's more, I've half a mind to shy a stone at his head." But he thought better of it and vanished with the rest of them, throwing somersaults and shouting at the rooks overhead, and Mr. Cheek continued his walk. We have only interrupted it for a passing glance at his popularity and authority, and his mode of maintaining them ; which, as we believe it to be the usual one, is, no doubt, the best.

The path improved in proportion as Mr. Cheek got farther from home, and he soon found himself ruminating along a very pretty one. The hill side on his left came down with waves of yellow blossom, and at some distance to his right descended to the bright little stream, which divided it from banks of purple heather and wild clumps of Scots fir and tortuous oak. But he had no feeling for the beauties of nature ; he had other things to think about. Presently he came to a picturesque lodge where he was admitted at a pair of handsome gates, by an old woman, to a winding drive through a thick and variegated shrubbery. A charming villa soon presented itself, with lawns and terraces of choice flowers, and fronted with a highly-wrought conservatory of treasures from lands which at that time had been but little ransacked.

What could have been the business of a man from a sty like Mr. Cheek's, in a spot so delicate as this ? The same question was asked of the old woman of the lodge when her helpmate tottered out to look at him.

"I can't think what it can be," replied the old man to himself. "He comes here pretty often, and Mrs. Toogood seems to think better of him than anybody else; but somehow or other, I never see Mr. Cheek without being reminded of the Book of Genesis and the devil getting into Paradise!"

An old butler and footman, who answered the door-bell when Mr. Cheek gave it a more modest pull than was his custom at the doors of more humble acquaintance, seemed in no great hurry to satisfy his question of whether Mrs. Toogood was at home. The fact, however, was not to be denied, and without acknowledging a few patronizing hopes of their well-being otherwise than by a bow of grave civility, the former of these long standing retainers opened the drawing-room door and showed in the visitor.

Mrs. Toogood was not present but would be looked for in the garden, and so whilst Mr. Cheek is staring at the elegance around him, we may give the few moments to some account of his agency and for whom he held it.

The proprietor was Sir Harry Longland, who many years ago enjoyed enough of Fortune's favours to desire no more. He had succeeded to an old baronetcy and a large fortune, had every advantage of person and requirement, and all the popularity which usually attends such claims, with the additional blessings of a beautiful and accomplished young wife, who had no thought but her devotion to him, and a bright little promise of the uncommon treasure which we have attempted to describe in our journey hither. This ought to have been a

happy home ; and so, for a few years, it was. It was courted by the country, famed for its delights, and replete with every attraction which admiring friends could desire or imagine. There was but one misfortune to apprehend, and that was from the too careless confidence in others, which is apt to beset unwonted good nature and unlimited resources. The few years were quite sufficient to make that misfortune a woeful example—bills, of which the thoughtless victim knew nothing, except that they bore his name on the back for the accommodation of a particular friend on the turf, who was to fill in the amount according to necessity, were produced against him by money lenders of whom he had never heard, and appalled him with a too late conviction that improvidence could be carried into crime. Lady Longland never recovered the shock of her husband's ruin—grief drove her into decline ; and, though she lingered awhile amongst their troubles, he had the misery of laying her in an early tomb, just when their young daughter had arrived at an age to appreciate her loss, and he himself was compelled to fly the country. No one, but Mr. Cheek, as his agent, knew what had become of him, and he, for years, had preserved a dead silence, to which he professed to be bound by solemn obligation. All that we can add to this imperfect account is, that Sir Harry's hapless wife was the sister of Mr. Bloomer, to whom he had given the living of Broome Warren on his marriage, and afterwards confided the guardianship of his forlorn child.

CHAPTER IV.

WE must now attend to Mrs. Toogood, who entered with courteous condescension, and was met with such elaborate and bland respect that Jack Rokins and his friends would have gaped their eyes out.

Mrs. Toogood was about sixty years old. She had a round and not very lofty figure, but her manner was dignified, and though marked with some ceremony was not wanting in affability. She wore a grey silk dress and a widow's half-mourning cap, and the spare silvery locks that strayed about her temples betokened a rather unusual pride in the absence of everything artificial. Her prevailing expression was one of demure superiority and strict decorum, which in the mouth was carried rather to excess. An artist might have thought it a trifle out of drawing, for it was not quite parallel with her eyes, and its diagonal line and habit of compression bespoke a feeling of pertinacity—perhaps infallibility.

Having condescendingly begged Mr. Cheek to be seated, she began the conversation with a flattering

assurance that she was always gratified to see him, and hoped he brought her improved intelligence of the Parish.

“Why, ma’am,” replied the gentleman, with a regretful shake of the head and a smile of commiseration; “you are aware it is rather a wilful one, but I am happy to say the charities with which you have so liberally entrusted me have made some improvement, and are likely to make more as they proceed.”

“Not a word about charities, I beg of you, Mr. Cheek, for it is a maxim with me to forget all about them. Our right hand should never know what is done by our left.” And Mrs. Toogood elevated her head and depressed the corners of the diagonal, as if conscious that she had delivered a sentiment unanswerable.

Mr. Cheek did not answer it, except by a bow of concession, and the assurance that he had never taken the liberty of saying a word about her in the dispensation of her bounty, and never would.

“I know you will not, Mr. Cheek, for I have always had the highest opinion of you. I formed it from the world’s contrariety; for, as my own endeavours to amend my neighbours have met with nothing but ingratitude, it is a logical conclusion that you have deserved too well to be understood.”

The diagonal was again compressed, defying mortal ingenuity to find a leak in the logic that could sail against wind and tide. Mr. Cheek acknowledged its soundness with another bow, and proceeded to say that, knowing Mrs. Toogood’s objection to be

told who were the recipients of her generosity, he had studiously refrained from making any list of their names, or memorandum of the extent to which they had been benefited. Mrs. Toogood was thankful for his consideration, though the villagers, with Messrs. Hodges and Co., might have had no objection to see their bank book duly balanced.

The conversation then turned to the subject for which it had been desired, and showed the good lady's heart to such advantage that we sincerely regretted the chinks in another place.

"You are aware, Mr. Cheek," she said, "of my great affection for Miss Longland, who has ever since the death of her mother and the ruin of her long absent father, been my only consolation for having no family of my own. I am now advanced in life, and it is time to think of her future position; for her uncle, our poor vicar, has, I fear, allowed his affairs to share the disorder of the parish."

"Ah, ma'am, I have often thought of it! The young lady's case is most distressing; and as I have made what little I possess by this agency for Sir Harry, I have studied day and night how to prove my grateful remembrance of it. Most willingly would I devote everything to her service and begin the world afresh! But then, you see, comes the recollection that if I did so it would no longer be possible to maintain my situation, and the property must become a wilderness—all the proceeds being paid to the creditors, and nothing for years having remained for the agent, of course no other could be found. It grieves me very deeply!"

Mr. Cheek heaved a sigh, and Mrs. Toogood was

more than ever confirmed in her good opinion of him. She could not sufficiently admire his principles, and earnestly begged they might give him no further uneasiness. He might fully rely upon her giving Miss Longland all necessary advice if she only knew what to advise about, but to determine this she must be guided by some more precise information as to the prospects of Sir Harry, and what had become of him. "It is, I think, fifteen years since he left this country, and I have heard from Miss Longland that it is fully twelve since she received so much as a letter from him, or any tidings of his existence, excepting through yourself."

"It is very true, ma'am, and seems very unnatural, though in reality it is not so. Sir Harry is compelled to be very cautious, for many of his creditors have sold their claims to foreigners, who are looking out for him in all countries, and, if they find him, he has nothing to expect but a life of imprisonment. Not having seen Miss Longland since her childhood, he is unable to judge of her prudence, and fearful of confiding his assumed name and the place of his retreat. I never omit an opportunity of removing these fears and representing the strength of character imparted by your admirable advice; but he has suffered deeply and is hard to be convinced. He writes the most affectionate messages to Miss Longland in reply to the remittances which, by an arrangement with the principal creditors, I am permitted to send him, and I never fail to deliver them the moment they come."

"Miss Longland has mentioned your attention in that respect, but I am sorry to say it is not enough

to satisfy a heart so devoted as hers. She remembers her father with the most intense love; and, notwithstanding her great struggles to bear up, is most unhappy."

"Poor young lady!" sighed the worthy agent.

"The greatest service you could render would be to inform her more fully about Sir Harry's present name and address, and all those other particulars of which she lives in such miserable ignorance."

"Alas, ma'am, I am equally miserable to withhold them! But what can I do, bound hand and foot by a solemn engagement? Sir Harry, who was always a man of strong impulse, would visit the forfeiture of my word with immediate dismissal from the agency, and Miss Longland would lose the only channel of what information she receives!"

Mrs. Toogood was obliged to admit the reasoning, though the common reflection with which she yielded to it, caused him to look up with rather a quick glance of enquiry, as if he doubted whether it was meant for comfort or reproach. Of course, it was a mere fancy, for it only signified that the fate of that helpless orphan, as she might not unreasonably be called, must be a dreadful contemplation to those who reduced her to it; and most happy were those who had no part in it! The man of confidence declined his eyes and conceded again, as he always did; and Mrs. Toogood went on to lament that poor Lucy had not been confided to better protection than that of an almost imbecile uncle, from whom she understood there were no hopes whatever.

“None, I fear, ma’am! None! Ah, Mr. Bloomer! He was a very worthy man; and it is most extraordinary that, after a life of so much respectability, he should have taken to habits so unbecoming and so grievous to us all! His addiction to ardent spirits has been the ruin of him.”

“I am not ignorant, Mr. Cheek, of your great endeavours to reform him, and how much you encourage his visits to your house to keep him out of harm’s way. But it seems to no purpose, for he grows weaker both in mind and body, and I have great fears that we may soon lose him. It is to meet such an emergency that I have requested this visit from you. Having some years ago laid by a few thousand pounds to accumulate for my young friend in the three per cent. consols, I have thought it time to make a codicil to my will, and am desirous of obtaining your signature as one of my witnesses.”

It was a rule in Mr. Cheek’s line of business to keep a sharp look out upon all mention of money; but he suddenly recollects that he was not in his office; and the business in hand was to look melancholy, that Mrs. Toogood, excellent as she was, must die like other people. So he merely shook his head and said, alas!

The bell was rung for the butler to be the second witness, and the sheet of foolscap was produced, and duly executed, and the business seemed done: but our far-sighted man of business continued musing and rather in a fidget, as if it were not done quite so completely as he thought advisable. Mrs. Toogood imagined she understood him, and hastened to ob-

serve, that though this was a bequest it would always be in her power to turn it into a present on Lucy's marriage, if she ever made up her mind to such an event.

“ Undoubtedly, ma'am ; and I earnestly pray she may receive it in that case instead of the first you contemplated. But there is one thing of which it strikes me very forcibly you must not lose sight. Miss Longland, with the amazing stores of good sense you have instilled into her, is in very singular circumstances. Her uncle's habits and the peculiarities of Mrs. Bloomer have deprived her of all acquaintance in her own rank of life, and she is known to nobody but the very small gentry hereabouts. If your generosity were made known she would immediately become an object of speculation to persons totally unworthy of her, and some very unhappy marriage might be the consequence ; or, supposing that not to be the case, there is no doubt that, so surrounded, all better chances would be kept aloof and she might never marry at all. I would, therefore, strongly advise you—that is, I would not presume to offer advice to a lady so much more capable of giving it—but strongly submit it to your consideration whether this provision should not remain a profound secret, even from the young lady herself, until some proper occasion for its announcement. The right time, I would take the liberty of suggesting, will be when the right person comes forward, for I feel it would be very dangerous before.”

“ Mr. Cheek, you are aware that my right hand knows nothing of my left ! Such friendly foresight will be quite sure to bring its own reward !”

Mr. Cheek humbly hoped it would.

She then placed, as was generally her custom, a five pound note for the most necessitous folks of the parish in one of his hands, which followed her own precept of never saying a word about it to the other, or to any body else, and Mr. Cheek bowed devoutly and dragged his heels homeward ; consulting the ground all the way on the subject of his next step.

On his arrival he found his day labourers assembled for the usual payment of Saturday afternoon—a bad habit they had contracted time out of mind—and, as there was no talking them into reason, he dispatched the one least likely to abscond to get change for five pounds, out of which he paid them punctually up to some day last month. They all seemed taken by surprise, and with more content than usual, and many thanks, set off in a happy party to the public-house.

It will, we dare say, be imagined that these five pounds composed the identical note which had been received from Mrs. Toogood ; but what then ? It had been given for the most necessitous folks in the parish, and it was conscientiously conveyed to them. If it did not happen to occur to Mr. Cheek that the weekly wages might have been more correctly liquidated from some other fund, we must recollect that he had a great deal to think about, and more excuses than most people for slight lapses of memory. We must likewise admit that it may be better to withhold charity altogether than dispense it amongst the vagabonds who, according to much excellent authority, are the only people that ever apply for it.

Benevolence, like Mrs. Toogood's, is apt to resemble some great fountain-head, which inundates and overwhelms the soil where benefit can only be derived from skilful irrigation ; and, where it is unable to work channels to the best advantage, it is surely desirable for expert engineering to lend assistance. We make these remarks because we have no doubt Mr. Cheek would have made them himself; and because, with his conspicuous place in our history, it is premature to judge him on his first appearance.

We trust a jury of our readers, supposing us to be blessed with a dozen, will agree with us, and accept a better plea than usual for "extenuating circumstances."

CHAPTER V.

IT is not surprising that though Mrs. Toogood's disposition was kind and generous, and her head not devoid of good sense when she would give it fair play, her inveterate self-complacency obscured one half of these claims on society, and made impatient people almost grudge her the other. Formal visits and formal returns, once or twice a twelvemonth, were nearly all the events of her life; for ever since she had been a widow—so long ago that the middle-aged generation had never seen her husband—she had thought fit to decline all parties, and regret her want of spirits to give any. And thus had her life been passing uncheered and eventless, excepting only the daily visit of her young friend, Lucy Longland.

This exception, considering the difference of age, and the still greater difference of character, would hardly have existed but for the dreary isolation of both parties, who were thus blown together like loose leaves, which blight too often mingles—the green with the sere. Lucy was always looked for and always brought comfort. She knew all the

wants to be relieved in the village ; read all that was worth, or not worth, hearing, in the "County Chronicle," arranged the flowers, touched sweetly on the old piano, which was never touched by anybody else, and submitted to a great deal of advice of which she stood in no need. Mrs. Toogood was therefore impatient for her return from London, whither she had been absent a whole week, and no doubt exposed to such company as would make it necessary to begin all the admonitions over again. What a responsible duty, and how fortunate that here was still one friend qualified to fulfil it.

The fervour of Mrs. Toogood's gratitude for this benign provision of nature was interrupted by the sound of wheels and the alarm of the door-bell. If she had looked for any other visitors than Lucy and her aunt, the doubt was removed by the crowing of a cock, and a shrill blast of command to keep the Aylesburys right side uppermost. In another moment Mrs. Bloomer streamed in to display the new fashions, and perform a self-imposed promise of calling on her way home, never dreaming how much more readily she would have been absolved from it than the unconsidered companion behind her.

Having already reported enough of Mrs. Bloomer's London triumphs, we will not indulge in a repetition, though the placid attention with which she was listened to really deserved to be chronicled. It is not often that the virtue of patience is met with amongst those who tax it so severely in others ; and if, in Mrs. Toogood's case, it sometimes resembled the patience of a poacher in watch for a

treacherous shot, she knew of old that the bird was impenetrable, and prudently reserved her ammunition. When, however, she had lent her ear long enough to doubt the chance of its restoration, she began to think it might be laid out to better interest on Lucy.

“And you, my dear,” she enquired with prim kindness, “have you nothing to tell me of the benefits you have derived from such distinguished circles?”

Lucy was obliged to acknowledge that she had not received very many. She had thought it best to excuse herself and devote the opportunity to lessons in many things in which she was deficient.

“Lessons! I believe so!” broke in the effervescent vicaress. “Nothing but the school-room from morning to night! It was quite useless to show her what a waste of time it was to learn things which none but outlandish people could understand. All my advice was thrown away.”

“Indeed!” said one side of the prim mouth, and “so much the better!” said the other. “Your eagerness for instruction, my dear, is quite a reproach to us all. Is it possible that you went all the way to London for nothing else?”

Lucy took the question as a mere ejaculation, and replied with admiring remarks upon a vase of beautiful roses and carnations, which stood on the table by which she was sitting, and were brilliant enough to reflect their hues upon her cheeks.

“I have been a sad truant to your flowers, my

dear Mrs. Toogood, but I will make amends, for I have missed them very much."

"And yet, would you believe it," said the irrepressible, "Bloomsbury Square was more blooming than ever, and she walked there every day. Nothing in London is worth talking about, though everything is so much better."

At all events there was nothing that Lucy meant to talk about but the roses, which were not well-arranged, and occupied all her attention.

"But ask her, Mrs. Toogood, only ask her what she thought of our journey home. She has plenty to say about that! Plenty!"

"Yes, truly," she replied, with apparent misapprehension, "I was very uneasy, and am so still, to know how my poor uncle has passed the time."

"Oh, me! I had so much news I quite forgot him! You don't happen to know how he does?"

"Very much better, I am happy to say," was Mrs. Toogood's slightly acidulated answer.

"I'm so glad. I was quite sure how it would be! I always take too much care of him. But only ask Lucy if she has not something else to tell you—ask her that!"

Perhaps Lucy's sweet lips might likewise have curled with a little acidulation had it not been impossible, for her love for her uncle was only second to that with which she remembered her parents.

"I believe," she said, "my aunt must allude to a pleasant companion who occupied a seat in the same carriage."

"Pleasant! I should think so! And wasn't he handsome? I should like to know that! Such a conversation about books and histories, and I don't know what all! And, oh me! if we had gone a few stages further, I believe I should never have got her home again. Half his name was Jim Crow, but what the other half was, goodness knows!"

"Jim Crow!" repeated Mrs. Toogood, a little more attentively,—"Jim Crow? And could you learn no more of him?"

"He would not tell," said Lucy, with a delicate tinge over her temples, "though aunt told him all about ourselves, and almost asked him."

Farther personal description appeared more and more to confirm some latent suspicion in Mrs. Toogood, and presently her countenance was beaming with satisfaction.

"And you thought him pleasant, did you, Lucy?"

"Oh yes, he was pleasant," and the tinge upon the dimples said "very."

"And did you agree with your aunt in thinking him so handsome?"

Lucy laughed, and did not know; but the treacherous tinge seemed to know better. She believed he was good-looking.

"And gentlemanly?"

The pertinacious questioning was enough to make any young lady laugh and blush, but there was no denying that he was very gentlemanly.

"And accomplished?"

Lucy could not pretend to be a judge, but she thought so.

“ Well, I think he will be flattered when I tell him all this ! ”

“ Oh, goodness gracious ! You know him then ? ”

Mrs. Toogood made it a maxim never to be hasty in forming conclusions : we were all fallible ; many persons were called Jim, and many names began with Crow ; but if the two abbreviations should happen to expand into James Crowley, she was happy to say he was her very favourite nephew.

“ You don’t say so ! You can’t mean it ! How strange ! How wonderful ! How incomprehensible, that your nephew should turn out to be my game-cock’s godfather, and that my game-cock’s godfather should turn out to be your nephew ! Could any one have imagined such a coincidence ? ”

“ You forget,” interrupted Lucy, who now saw the motive of all the questions she had answered so unwarily, and began to tremble for their betrayal ; “ you forget that Mrs. Toogood is by no means certain.”

“ Very true, my dear ; it is wrong to be certain ; for those who are never certain can never be disappointed. All that I go by is a telegram I received this morning to acquaint me that my nephew had a little business in this part of the country, and would sleep here to-night.”

And he was punctual to his word. Mrs. Bloomer’s preceding raptures had drowned another ring at the bell, and just at that moment the butler again opened the door to announce Mr. James Crowley.

Mrs. Bloomer was in great commotion, and Lucy could not help some small degree of confusion whilst Mrs. Toogood advanced to meet him with unwonted

vivacity, and re-introduce him with becoming form—a ceremony for which he had been prepared by the equipage at the door, though he had by no means got over his bewilderment as to what such a whim of fortune might portend.

Having bowed to a hurricane on one side and a graceful recognition on the other, and duly congratulated himself on the unexpected pleasure of the meeting, he seated himself by his aunt to make the usual dutiful inquiries, appearing really to feel some interest in the matter.

As Lucy foresaw, the earliest opportunity was taken for disconcerting her.

“ Do you know, James, we were actually talking about you at the moment you came in, and it is fortunate you did not hear us ? Such compliments are apt to make young gentlemen rather vain, and it would be wrong to tell you anything about them. It is all very well to be pleasant and accomplished and gentlemanly and good-looking, but people should never think themselves so—should they, Lucy ?”

Whether James was in danger of becoming conscious of such qualities, we will not inquire, but he had the good taste to laugh at them, and bow his acknowledgments only to Mrs. Bloomer, as if he knew it to be quite out of the question that any younger lady could recollect him for a moment. It earned him some gratitude and wounded no delicacy ; but there was a visible retirement of manner where he could least afford it. He made many ingenious changes in the conversation, but the damage was never quite repaired.

“And so,” continued the complacent aunt, “you have at last found your way to Broome Warren; quite satisfied, I suppose, with paying me the compliment of a visit when I chance to be in London. But I never disturb the enjoyment of the present by recalling the mortifications of the past; for it is our duty, as I have often told you, to prefer happiness to pain, which I think no reasonable person would contradict.”

“I am quite of your opinion, aunt; its wisdom is undeniable, and I always do my best to follow it. In proof of which, my present business in the country is to find a pleasant home hereabouts and become a rural squire under your excellent auspices.”

Mrs. Bloomer proclaimed her delight, both for self and niece; but Aunt Toogood was more concerned to account for such a change.

“Now, James, you cannot deceive me! I am sure you must be ill, and have been recommended change of air. Ah, you may laugh, and it is quite right to keep up your spirits and look so well; but we all know that, in pulmonary affections, the looks are no criterion.”

“Oh, goodness gracious me!” burst in the vicaress. “There’s nothing like ass’s milk for consumption, and I have a female donkey that will be just the thing!”

Lucy’s demure fit was not proof against this suggestion, and she joined the invalid in a little peal of amusement.

“No, indeed,” he protested; “you need be under no apprehensions. I have no doctor but myself, and

have prescribed the country only because I am tired of town. I have brought my cab down in order that I may drive about in search of a hunting-box. By-the-bye, being so far astray, I went to the wrong station, which deprived me of the satisfaction of giving a lift to my godson."

Vain subterfuge! Gifted minds are not so easily deceived.

"No, my dear nephew, no! If it is not incipient consumption that drives you here, it is something else which is very apt to produce it. I admire your fortitude, for there is no doubt whatever that you have met with some disappointment. Ah, Mrs. Bloomer, it is long since *you* can have had one, and Lucy will probably never have any to forget; but I can assure you it is no subject for ridicule."

There was a feeling in the reproof which showed Mrs. Toogood to have had cruel experience; and her dutiful nephew, who had sometimes an exceptionable habit of humouring her wisdom for his own amusement, was tempted to recur to it to enliven the reluctant mirth behind the carnations. The justness of his aunt's penetration was acknowledged with becoming melancholy; and a catalogue of wounds from certain crack shots, which would have made a cock-pheasant in a battue comparatively scathless. He had found every heart at Almack's engaged half-a-dozen deep, and his peace of mind was worn out in waiting for a vacancy. The forest should be his hospital, the nightingales his consolation, and the beeches they sang upon would serve as tablets for half the names in the "Court Guide." Mrs. Toogood

shook her head with a sigh, and merely observed that it was not the first time that victims had been known to excite hilarity at their own expense.

But Mrs. Bloomer's bottled spirits, which had been fizzing ever since the mention of a hunting-box, burst out with an explosion :

“ My dear Mr. Crowley ! My dear sir ! A hunting-box did you say ? I provided for your want the moment you named it ! The place of all places ! Beautiful, Elizabethan, wild, lonely, and large enough to hold all ‘ the sorrows of Werther,’ and haunted enough, I dare say, to frighten all the sufferings out of Guy’s or Bartholomew’s. Ha, ha ! But you know I am only joking ; for I cannot say you look as if your sufferings were very great ; and, seriously speaking, there’s hunting and shooting enough to have comforted Job himself. I am only sorry it is two or three miles from us ; but we’ll come and see you every day, and send all our friends,—so different from those you are tired of ! Such a delightful change ! Never mind Lucy’s objections ; for I see she is going to dissuade you. It is only because she has an interest in letting it, and thinks it unbecoming to take such quick advantage of our introduction. The advantage is all on your side, and, of course, I am the best judge.”

Lucy was indeed very much discomposed, and protested that Oakendell was nothing more than a ruin, and had not been inhabited for the last twenty years.

“ The very thing to recommend it,” Crowley insisted. “ I have a fellow-feeling for ruins, owls, and

bats, and if there is only a ghost, my establishment will be complete ; for I came here to be a hermit, and shall take my wallet and staff and make a pilgrimage to Oakendell this afternoon."

Lucy attempted to smile, but she was still mortified, and remarked that her uncle must have been waiting dinner for the last hour. The hint succeeded in reminding Mrs. Bloomer of an individual who might have been supposed to have some claim to consideration, and she started up with many apologies for tearing herself away.

"Good-by, Mrs. Toogood ; good-by, Mr. Crowley. You must excuse me. I'll stay longer the next time ; indeed I will ; and I'll send and prepare Mrs. Rokins, who has charge of the house, and will do your washing for you ; and tell her to be sure and have her pretty daughter Sukey in the way, in case you should want a housemaid ; and you'll be such a happy hermit, you won't know what to do with yourself."

And out she rushed, with a flutter and a fuss that again called to mind the tail of a sky-rocket. Lucy passed him with the semi-formality of a smile and a bow, but too much embarrassed with the absurdities of their brace of aunts to add a word of adieu.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Crowley was seated alone with Mrs. Too-good, her first inquiry was what he thought of Lucy Longland. Of course there was but one opinion to be given, but he had been sufficiently warned by the ill-judged repetition of Lucy's opinion of himself to give it less emphatically than he felt it. He could not, however, refrain from asking further information about her, and returned to the subject of Oakendell, inquiring what particular interest she possessed in it. This obtained him all that he wanted, as the explanation involved her whole history, as far as we have given it. The conclusion was an answer to his question. The creditors of Sir Harry Longland, though they had laid hands on the main proceeds of his estate, had by some means been prevented from including those of Oakendell, which were reserved for the maintenance of his daughter. Unfortunately, the highly respectable agent had never been able to sell it or find a tenant, and poor Lucy had lived, from the time of her father's departure from England, entirely dependent upon her uncle—a state which she every year felt more bit-

terly, and the end of which presented no prospect whatever.

“None whatever!” repeated Crowley, who had listened with much more attention than he usually paid to his esteemed aunt. “Has Mr. Bloomer nothing but his living?”

“He has, I believe, a few hundreds a-year during his life, but nothing to leave; for the lady he married, of whom you have just seen as much as you desire, was the daughter of a small attorney, sufficiently sharp-sighted to perceive that Mr. Bloomer knew nothing of business and might easily be imposed upon. The marriage-settlement was said to have been drawn up without examination or inquiry, and everything the poor man had at his disposal secured to his widow.”

“But the widow—when she becomes one?”

“Will, I fear, do nothing. She has by no means the affection for Lucy which she would have us believe. Old as she is, she is jealous of that great beauty, and equally so of that superior understanding, which, however unobtrusive, tends to keep her in a state of petty discomfort, if not of subjection. She sees that, in the estimation of the few people they know, she occupies a second place, which is an additional reason for limiting the few to a few less, and chafes at the necessity of confining her discontent to taunts against all acquirements which she has not education to understand, and all the more becoming feelings which she has not heart to emulate. When ever Mr. Bloomer dies, this forced restraint will cease, and there is little doubt that her first exercise of

freedom will be to disembarass herself of the hapless girl whom her vanity has conjured into a rival."

Crowley was surprised to see how his aunt's momentary forgetfulness of her mission to instruct the world could emancipate such tolerably good sense. Perhaps many besides Mrs. Toogood could pass through their lives with improved grace, if they could only dismount from some stumbling hobby-horse.

"And what," he asked, suppressing a few strong remarks upon Sir Harry and the vicar, "what could induce her uncle to take a step so lamentable?"

"He had become acquainted," she replied, "with his wife's father upon some occasion of law connected with his living, and had been presented as a good catch to the waning fascinations that graced the upper stories of the office. Having never been famous for powers of resistance, a combined attack from four or five sources at once had, in the course of a few visits, fluttered the weak garrison of his head into a capitulation. He had made himself so agreeable that some atonement was indispensable; and a merciful arrangement provided that the pillage should be restricted to one assailant only—that one being selected at the intercession of several potent fits of hysterics. And so it was that Miss Angelica Liptrot had marched into Broome Warren at the head of her sky-rocket tail, and planted her standard in its once peaceful vicarage."

Crowley restrained himself to an expression of wonder that, with so many admirable gifts, Miss

Longland had not been provided for by some suitable marriage.

“Ah, my dear James, that is what I have often thought about; but very few persons would be suited to Lucy, and the better families about the country have never seen her.”

“But surely she has some acquaintance in London?” he asked, in a manner which any one else would have thought pointed.

“I am sorry to say none. Both her father and mother were the last of their families, except Mr. Bloomer; and when misfortune fell upon them, their acquaintance fell off, which is too often the case when there is nobody to instruct such people that these are the times when they ought to cling closer. The only gentleman she knows is a very good young man who resides near the village and has long entertained a devoted affection for her.”

“A young man!” echoed Crowley, with a little more quickness and a little more point than before; “and who the —— is the devoted young man? Who is he?”

“A Mr. Philpot. As I say, he is very good, and I have no doubt you will like him exceedingly; for he is a great sportsman and will make you an excellent companion; but he is not much as to family or education, and I believe his means are little better. Lucy has claims to a husband of far greater pretensions, though, under the peculiar circumstances, I have never quite decided upon offering my advice; partly from the difficulty of judging what is best for her, and partly because she has never asked it. The

necessity of relying upon her own guidance at home has induced a habit of withholding her confidence everywhere else ; and no one who is capable of appreciating her great good sense, would venture to intrude upon it. Besides, notwithstanding her sweet temper, she is very high-minded, and has a tact, most remarkable in so young a person, for making everything relating to herself unapproachable. For several years she has not even mentioned her father, though the deep gloom that comes over her, whenever she believes herself to be unobserved, shows too well how her thoughts are engaged."

"Yes, yes ; I can understand all that, and sympathize with her cause for sorrow, and admire her pride and her prudence ; but about this very good Mr. Philpot and his devotion. Of course, such an amiable young lady is not insensible to it ?"

"I suspect not, James. Indeed, I more than suspect ; because it is not right to suspect before you are certain. When young persons reside in the same village and are in daily communication—more especially when they happen to be only two—you know there is invariably a reciprocity."

Our sensitive friend asked no more questions, and looked somewhat blank and bitter, as one who thought the world a bad bargain and not worth a rush. Perhaps he did not fancy his aunt was quite so sensible as she had seemed five minutes before ; perhaps triple reciprocities were not in his way, and the fastidious spirit which could not condescend to be the rival of coronets, might not have been very eager to contest a prize against corduroys and high-

lows. Perhaps the man of the platform paid him another visit—perhaps Lucy was descending from the skies into a common country flirt, who could not travel a hundred miles without a scamp at one end and a lout at the other. Whatever his cogitations might have been, he carried them off to prepare for dinner, at which Mrs. Toogood expected him to do credit to the change of air by an excellent appetite.

But the expectation, as far as it was founded on a dainty repast that would have tempted most people who had travelled so far upon a cup of coffee, was not fulfilled. He preferred dining on his disappointment, now much more substantial than his former ones, and seemed to enjoy that sort of cheer immensely. It is probable that anybody but the respected lady, so charmed with his high spirits, might have thought him a trifle artificial; for, in conformity with occasional propensities of art, they left nature a long way behind them; but she was rather disposed to flatter herself that their excitement arose from the pleasure of her own society. It was, therefore, no wonder that she exerted herself to keep them alive by reminding him how much his engagement of Oakendell House would assist the prospects of Lucy and Mr. Philpot.

Dinner was soon over; for the fine trout of the first course was untouched, though strongly recommended as the catching of that good young man; and the beautiful leveret of the second was equally unfortunate, though shot by the same hand. It was a marvel what James could live upon; for there was clearly some clause in the code of fashion against the

countrified habits of the table ; and Mrs. Toogood only wished she knew the substitute, because it would be such a benefit to the poor.

When left to himself, he drew his chair to the window, more to enjoy his inward contemplations than the harmonious scene without, and looking as if he rather agreed with Solon, that no man could be accounted happy till he was dead. Of a certainty, the history of his past life, since nine o'clock that morning, had not been very encouraging. Could any one have dreamt that those translucent eyes, in which he had seemed to catch the first glimpse of a heart untrammelled, would prove as great a delusion as the blacks and blues of Belgravia ? That, like them, they had brightened by the application of soft nonsense, and, like nothing else, deepened by penetrating the mysteries of bad grammar and provincial *patois* ? But for this wonder of the wilderness, he might have found its natives very good sort of people. Even Mrs. Bloomer might have shown some quality or other which was not quite detestable ; and Jack, or Joe—or, devil take him ! Philpot himself—might have proved something short of a Caliban. She had cast a blight over all the country, and he wondered at what o'clock next day the train started for London.

And yet it might have occurred to him that people who are disposed to be jealous, are not always disposed to be just. That Lucy had given the first shake to his dormant nature, and roused it into that state of chaos which seems a needful preliminary to all sorts of re-arrangement. She had given him a lesson, of which he might be sensible by-and-bye,

that a little real pain is a vast deal better than no feeling—inasmuch as it proves there is something to be pained, and some hope of a remedy.

Perhaps the mild influence of a summer afternoon and a lovely landscape, which should all have been the inheritance of the poor girl he had been judging so harshly, tended to soften down these asperities, for it was not long before his troubled aspect began to give way to a change more becoming. Perhaps he chanced to experience that, in the language of some of his club, bad blood cannot long maintain the race in which it is matched against better; and perhaps he stumbled upon the recollection that Lucy had never seen him till that morning, and was therefore certainly not accountable to him for anything that had passed before. Her position was surely such as might excuse her for preferring any other that might offer. She was very young and very desolate, and had no advisers but such as were more likely to lead her wrong than right. It must have been a hard heart that could make no allowance for her, and an ungenerous one that could dwell upon self-inflicted mortifications, to the exclusion of all sympathy. Crowley's was neither the one nor the other. After all, he had relied upon nothing but the authority of his aunt, who prided herself upon thinking differently from everybody else. And so he looked at his watch and found it was only seven o'clock, and just the time to take a pleasant drive to Oakendell House, and forget as much as he could.

CHAPTER VII.

HE was soon reclining behind his handsome pair of bays, and passing through the village, which he found busy in the full enjoyment of Saturday evening. Little ragged troops were playing at leap-frog in the road, and lads and lasses were playing hide-and-seek in the sunny corners. The more opulent dealers in short cut and tobacco pipes were doing pretty well in the world; and the butcher, and the baker, and the grocer, to judge by the old women who emerged from their tumble-down huts with loaves and rushlights, and loaded skewers, were doing better still. But all had their fortunes to make, and the most rising establishments had a declining tendency.

A little out of the village was a pretty cottage, covered tastefully with trellis-work and woodbine, and fronted by a neat little garden with beds of blooming flowers. A donkey with a side-saddle and a jackanapes in livery were standing at the ornamental wicket. That, thought Crowley, must be the happy individual that is christened after the favourite gentleman. As he passed, a broad, flabby face ap-

peared at the window; that, he thought, must be my brother godfather! Farther on, the yellow sandy road wound through the wilderness of broom, and there he beheld two ladies who had met a gentleman on horseback. One of them turned a fair face towards him as he approached, and would have been very pretty in any place from which Lucy Longland was absent. The other was engaged in conversation with the horseman, and in the act of giving him a letter. That, he thought—he was sure—was Lucy herself; and the horseman could be no other than the very good young man. It cost him a start, but he slightly slackened his pace to bow with a better grace. Lucy seemed to colour as she smiled and returned his salutation, and when he had passed he leant back again and left the bays to drive themselves.

“So, she gives him a letter, filled with everything that could not be said before her companion. My poor old aunt was right after all! That *must* have been the fellow, and the case is pretty far gone, for no time has been lost in meeting!”

The scenery from hence was very romantic, but it was lost upon him for the next mile. He then ascended some high ground and looked about him. To the right, the forest was endless; to the left, it sloped with intervals of cultivation and scattered groups of timber. Large tracts of every sort of undergrowth in fullest blossom were waving and undulating almost as high as the stunted thorns, and appeared to extend themselves to the blue line of the far off sea. At a short distance in this wild

valley rose a knoll of fir trees and holly, and untrimmed foliage more appropriate to the garden, and from the midst of these shot up the tall chimneys and pointed gables of an old red-bricked residence, overgrown with verdure. The fantastic style of building, with its tracery of grotesque ornament and narrow windows, all winking in the glare of the setting sun, bore evidence of the lucubrations of those by-gone architects who, with all their gifts, seem never to have known their own minds. It also recalled the "maiden throned by the west," who was very often in the same predicament.

"That," thought Crowley, "must be Oakendell House;" wherewith he took the road to it, and felt he had never seen anything to suit him better.

Mrs. Rokins and her nice-looking Sukey had finished their daily occupations and were just enjoying their cup of tea, when the strange gentleman drove up to the griffins that guarded the entrance—handsome, heavy, and whimsical, but too strongly constructed to have suffered so much dilapidation as might have been expected. The doors were immediately thrown open by the stout elderly dame, who had pulled the tail of her gown out of her pocket holes, and primmed herself out as she ran to anticipate the bell, and looked precisely in keeping with the walls.

"I presume," said Crowley, "I have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Rokins, and that this is Oakendell House?"

"Lord, sir," she replied, showing two or three teeth with a smile of dilated wonder. "Your

honour has the advantage of me, and I dunno how you could have found the one or ever heard of the other! You are the first gentleman that has been here for going on for twenty year!"

"I hope we shall be all the better friends. I am come to request you will be good enough to show me the house, as I have some thoughts of living here."

"Deary me! I'm sure I hope you will! Some gentleman that Miss has brought with her from London, I durst to say?"

"I have had the pleasure of travelling in Miss Longland's company, and that is the cause of my giving you this trouble."

"Trouble, sir, for Miss Lucy! Blessings on her, we are a rough set about here, but the worst of us would give our lives to pick up so much as a pin for her! God send she's well, sir?"

"As well as you could wish, Mrs. Rokins; for I saw her on my way here. You seem to be well acquainted with her?"

"I ought, your honour; I've known her ever since she was born, and I might say long before, for I was laundress to Sir Harry and Lady Longland from their wedding day. But it's no use talking of that now. Things is changed, and I can't a-bear to think of them. Will you please to walk in, sir?"

He entered a handsome octagon-shaped hall, not very spacious, except in its altitude, which was only terminated by a skylight, with more quaint and cunning decoration of former days, and the finely-wrought figure of a bronze stork hovering in the

centre, and bearing what was once a gilded chain, with a nest of young ones, all stretching their necks and screaming fire. Around it turned a spiral staircase, protected by railing of the same glittering material, and cast in as many fancies of leaf and tendril as an arabesque. The walls were panelled curiously with carved oak, with which the floor was inlaid, and the whole was polished and slippery as ice.

Crowley expressed great surprise; and, repeating the description he had heard from Lucy, demanded by what supernatural agency such renovation had been achieved. The well-pleased dame assured him there was nothing supernatural, for nothing could be less so than the will of everybody to serve Miss Lucy—except, indeed, Mr. Cheek, who went just contrariwise, and had done his best ever since Sir Harry went away to keep people from coming a-nigh the place.

“Mr. Cheek! The person of whom Mrs. Toogood has so high an opinion!”

“Aye, sir; the more’s the pity, for she has it all to herself. This house, your honour, used once to be a perfect diamond, and was always kept for the eldest son of the family, if so be he married—and the money that was laid out upon it—Ah, well well; it’s all gone now—and it’s a pity, but Mr. Cheek was gone too—nobody cares where.”

“Why, what has he done?”

“All the mischief he could, sir; and that’s not a little. In the first place, neither he nor his father before him, ever since they came upon the property, had any thought but how they could wrong their

masters and turn everything to their own account ; and since the great break up he has got a thousand times worse, because he has had nobody to be afeard of. As soon as he was left the only man of confidence he turns his own bullocks into the gardens and his hogs into everywhere else ; and what's worse, he turns a wicked woman into the house, which was good enough for my masters, to drink gin and fright away all the neighbourhood."

" You astonish me ! And for what purpose was this ?"

" Just to prevent gentlefolks from hiring it, and keep it for himself. For I dunno how many years she drank gin here, sometimes with Mr. Cheek and sometimes without him. It was all one to her—and let this beautiful old house go to rack a-purpose. If any one told her she ought to be ashamed of herself she'd say she only obeyed orders ; and as all were in mortal fear of the agent there was none to speak about it. I tried more than once to rouse up the vicar, but he's a friend of Mr. Cheek's and forgets what's said as fast as he hears it ; and then I tried Miss Lucy ; but she, for some reason or other which I have never been able to make out, is more afeard than anybody else ; and so every think went to rot and ruin. But there was another sweetheart of that woman as was not far off, and had as good a right to her as Mr. Cheek. It's just three months since he fetched her away, and left the rest of her to a crowner's 'quest.'

" Upon my word, Mrs. Rokins, I owe you very much for this warning, for I should naturally have entered

into negotiations with the agent instead of troubling the young lady herself. But can you form no guess as to her reasons for dreading him so much?"

"No, sir, none. And the state into which I had the misfortune to throw her was enough to prevent me from ever speaking again. I can only fancy it is something as respects somebody else, for of Miss Lucy I know everything from her cradle."

"Do you think this somebody else is somebody in London?"

"Oh, no, your Honour! she never was in London till this week in all her life. But, as I was saying, the woman who died here, and was routed out by the coroner, got the house a bad name, and nobody would come to look after it till I offered to come myself for Miss Lucy's sake. You never see such a place. But I am a hearty old body, and can work as hard as a young 'un; and so I drove the hogs out of the drawing-room, and shovelled out the dirt, and took to soap and brushes, with my daughter Sukey to help me, and as many more as I could get after their day's work was done; and all for love, for Mr. Cheek has never come to see us and never paid us a penny. If he had know'd what we was about, it's odds but he'd have put a stop to it."

"Does Miss Longland know this?"

"Not she, poor dear! She'd have given us the bright eyes out of her blessed head, and she hasn't got more than enough to buy a ribbon for it. But if so be you take this house—well, sir, I won't say what would hurt her feelings—will your Honour please to look into the drawing-room?"

Crowley followed her in.

“ You see, sir, there was no papering to soil, and the fine carpets and curtains we was obliged to burn. But it ain’t so bad neither.”

She had indeed done wonders. The substantial oak and its carvings had withstood all injuries, and panel and floor, and elaborate chimney-piece and window frames, and curious furniture, would have driven a collector into raptures; everything was shining in the searching sun rays with a brilliancy that was only outdone by the happy glistening in the old woman’s eyes.

“ Mrs. Rokins, I need look no farther. My mind is made up.”

“ Oh ! but you haven’t seen the dining-room opposite, nor the ‘tother sitting-room, nor the libry, nor nothing at all yet.”

He could not withstand that honest pride, and was hurried all over the house, which improved at every step.

“ And now, your Honour, I’m only afraid you’ll be daunted with the out-buildings. There’s plenty of stables, and all that, but what with the bullocks and the pigs, they want more hands than I can find.”

“ But they are to be had for money.”

“ Oh, yes, your Honour, as many as you like for money ; but there’s the mischief.”

“ Put on a score of the best fellows you can find, and refer them to me. And where’s the nearest place to find an upholsterer ?”

“ There’s a first-rate one, sir, at Lympton ; seven miles off.”

“Then send somebody to bring him here on Monday morning, with all the best furniture he has.”

“Lord bless you, sir! But the rent—may be that mightn’t suit.”

“Well, Mrs. Rokins, I dare say it will not be ruinous.”

“Mr. Cheek has never fixed any yet, because he never wanted a tenant; but when the premises was all at their best, four or five-and-twenty years ago, Sir Harry’s father let it to a gentleman for a terrible deal—as much as two hundred pounds a year.”

“Well, then, my dear good Mrs. Rokins, as times are more expensive now, suppose we say three.”

“Lawk a mercy! your Honour cannot be in earnest. Three hundred a year for Miss Lucy.”

“If that’s not enough we’ll make it more. But mind, I shall want a housekeeper, and, I hope, a lady’s maid, and make it a condition that you and pretty Sukey remain where you are. And now tell me who is this coming here on horseback?”

Poor Mrs. Rokins was almost screaming with transport, and her eyes were blinded, but a wipe of her apron enabled her to make out that it was “young Mr. Philpot.”

“So,” thought Crowley, “adventures thicken.” But he felt a new sensation, the first thrill that he was not living in vain, and he found it the next best thing to the love of Lucy.

“Have you no one to hold his horse? I should like to make Mr. Philpot’s acquaintance.”

The good woman rushed into the stable yard.

"Here, Jack ! Jack Rokins, where are you, boy ?"

Our friend Jack, whom the reader will recollect for his polite message to Mr. Cheek a few hours since, was not far off, and Mr. Philpot dismounted. He was by no means the monster of high-lows and corduroys that Crowley had imagined, though not less rural. He looked shy and rosy red, and a little swollen in the cheeks, as if he had just escaped from the Thugs with a double twist of a white cravat, and the same cause would have accounted for the expression of his eyes, which were squeezed up to some resemblance of the Guinea pig; but with these exceptions, and the close cropping of the village hair-dresser, he was more sinned against than sinning. It would be hard to call any man to account for the misdeeds of a provincial tailor, after he has once borne them on his back.

"I believe, sir," said Crowley, with a good-natured advance, "I owe you an apology for touching your horse with my wheel as I passed you on the road. I trust there was no damage."

"Oh, none, sir; not in the least. Quite the contrary! I have to apologize to you for intruding when you are busy with Mrs. Rokins; but I have been commissioned to give her a note from Miss Longland."

Mrs. Rokins retired a step to break it open, when something tumbled out which proved to be a sovereign. What a tinge of shame it brought into Crowley's cheek. The letter then was not a collection of raptures for Mr. Tom Philpot, but a sweet

little deed of charity of which he had been made the messenger. Tom looked handsome from that moment.

“Look here, sir,” said the proud old woman, “Here’s a better observation on my young lady’s nature than the like of me can make. She never has a bit of gold in her hand but it’s laid out in a blessing. I’m sure if Squire Philpot was not so good as to ride about of her errands her blessed feet would wear out long before her heart.” With which she again tried to make out the few hasty lines.

“You have a very enviable office, Mr. Philpot, in being Miss Longland’s almoner. There are few who would not be proud of it.”

“That’s very true, sir; and I’m lucky there’s nobody hereabouts to take it off my hands.”

Tom’s fair face flushed as if it would smoke. It might have been with the incense of adoration, or it might have been from natural bashfulness, which had never before been scrutinized by such a keen observer, but Crowley was too much ashamed of the mistake he had made to risk another quite so soon. He felt Lucy’s new mystery too charmingly accounted for to admit a question of anything she did. What might be the degree of admiration she excited in all who knew her was no fault of hers, and could be no reasonable concern of his, since he was fully convinced there were no two ways of thinking of her. And so, as Mr. Tom Philpot’s good-natured and unpretending face could not by any conjuration be fitted to the shoulders of an enemy,

a little self-reproach suggested that it might not be altogether unsuitable to those of a friend. Further conversation about the place and the neighbourhood and its sporting capabilities, with many other things which usually engage the interest of a new comer, improved this impression so much that when Crowley found it time to return to his aunt he had still something further to say.

“Allow me to ask, Mr. Philpot, whether you are going back to Broome Warren?”

Mr. Philpot was going there, and lived within half a mile of Mrs. Toogood.

“Why, then, as you have begun the evening with a good office for my future landlady, I dare say you will forgive me for begging another for her tenant.”

“Anything in the world, sir.”

“Then do let me beg, as the first thing, that you will trust your horse to my groom, and allow me to drive you back.”

Tom was perfectly happy; and in such a glow of gratitude for the good fortune of Lucy, that he would have been equally so to transact any business Mr. Crowley might have at the North Pole.

As they stepped into the phaeton, Mrs. Rokins received her last instructions to consider the house and all belonging to it as let from that day, without any reference whatever to Mr. Cheek, and to restore everything to what she recollects it in better days. A touch of the rein, and the bays were off again, leaving the worthy lady gazing with astonishment at something very bright in her palm, and vowing

to Sukey that there never was such a gentleman before, and never would be such another.

They had not proceeded far before Mr. Philpot confirmed the character which had been given of the agent in every particular.

“I’ve known him from a boy,” he said, “and I never heard anybody speak a good word for him, except—if you’ll be good enough to excuse me—Mrs. Toogood, who is a very charitable lady, and takes him up, I believe, because everybody else has dropped him; though I should be ungrateful to see any harm in that, because she has taken me up too, seeing that very few of the gentry hereabouts have thought it worth while.”

“It would be hard,” replied Crowley, amused at his new friend’s candour, “if she were not right once in a way. But about this Cheek. Is there any obligation, do you know, why I should enter into negotiations with him respecting Oakendell?”

“Not the least, Mr. Crowley. I am not much of a hand at business, but I happen to know something about this, because people talk a great deal about it. When Sir Harry left the country, a good many years ago, Cheek was appointed receiver of the rents for his creditors, but only for the Broome Warren estate. Oakendell was delivered up to Mr. Bloomer for the use of Miss Longland, till she might become of age to manage it for herself.”

“Is she of age yet?”

“I cannot quite say, but I wish it may be so; for Mr. Bloomer, ever since his foolish marriage, has taken to bad habits, and become quite incapable of

transacting affairs of any kind; so that Cheek, without other authority, has filled his place."

"And from that, Mr. Philpot, with your assistance, I mean to turn him out."

"There's nothing that would give me greater pleasure." And honest Tom dropped a glance upon his fist.

"I fear we cannot call upon him for his wilful damage, because the responsibility would rest on Mr. Bloomer; but we'll prevent him from doing any more. Has the principal property suffered in the same way?"

"Quite as far as he could make it; though, being liable to inspection from those who draw the rents, he has been compelled to keep up better appearances. Still it pays him a fortune for its ruin, and has lost more than half its value in the time of Sir Harry."

"Has Miss Longland no other relation to look to her father's affairs?"

Tom shook his head sadly. "Not one, since the family misfortunes. The worst of it is, I don't think she would appeal to any one if she could, though she sees Cheek's rascality as plainly as other people do, and evidently holds him in great horror. He seems to have some spell on her which keeps her in constant alarm; so much so that, though I am often employed in her service, as you have just seen me, I have long been discouraged from mentioning his name."

"I heard the same from the good woman at Oakendell. Can you form no guess at the cause?"

“Not the most remote.”

They drove on, pondering on this circumstance, till, approaching Broome Warren, Crowley again bethought him of the subject more immediately in hand. “I said that, with your assistance, I meant to be rid of him from Oakendell: and if you will oblige me, as you do Miss Longland, with a little of your agency, I shall be very thankful.”

“Anything, Mr. Crowley, as I said before.”

“Then pray be good enough to take the reins for a moment.” Tom took them, and he continued: “It will deprive Mr. Cheek of one pretext for interfering if I pay my rent in advance; and, as luck would have it, I arrived too near dinner-time to change my dress, so that I happen to have my pocket-book here, with a supply for the next month or two.” As he spoke he took out three notes. “Here, Mr. Philpot, are three hundreds; and the favour I have to beg is, that you will place them in the hands of Miss Longland, and announce me as her tenant, and shareholder in Mrs. Rokins and pretty Sukey.”

“My dear sir!”

“Pray make her understand that this is the regular way of doing business, and that I will do my best to be a good tenant if she will not allow Mr. Cheek to turn me out. And now, as I know you are a sportsman, of which I saw evidence at my aunt’s to-day, we must say a word on that matter. Can you tell the extent of the shooting attached to Oakendell?”

“Three or four thousand acres. I know the manor

well, for my father and I had entire liberty over it till Sir Harry went away and Cheek warned us off."

"Did he so? Then pray oblige me by warning *him* off. Or no—I must not make you enemies, and will do it myself. Remember you are Miss Longland's agent, with full liberty to kill all you can. But stay. Who are those ladies walking towards the vicarage?"

"Miss Longland herself and Miss Lightfoot."

"Then now's your time, my good sir. Catch them before they get home, and so escape Mrs. Bloomer."

Tom stopped the horses, and the servant trotted up with his own.

"Make haste! They are almost at the gate."

The message was too pleasant to need the recommendation, and the very unexpected allies took their separate directions in mutual admiration.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was now twilight, and Mr. Cheek, always exact in business, having carefully entered in a large ledger against his employers the last item of his claims for outlay, which consisted of five pounds for the workmen, had replaced it in a capacious tin box full of papers, and was gazing from the one window of his little damp and dark parlour in admiration of his manure-heaps, and impatience for his evening potation. A little inward comfort was indeed wanting, for there was not much around him. The walls appeared never to have seen any season but winter, and the furniture showed as many vicissitudes of travel, suggesting a variety of auctions and changes of residence, as the casualty-ward of a hospital, set apart for lame legs and broken backs. It must have been consoling to see the damsels who acted as his housekeeper make her entrance with a black bottle and the usual preparations for a comfortable tumbler.

She was a fine grown specimen of the forest, with not bad features, though they expressed rather too much of the wildness and determination of some-

thing newly captured and not very manageable. It was said that a great deal of this was put on to keep her present owner at a reasonable distance, but that he had ever shown a disposition to encroach upon it was not to be supposed of any gentleman honoured by the patronage of Mrs. Toogood. At all events he had shown no weakness by indulging her vanity in the article of dress, for if her eyes flashed with the unbroken spirit of the wilderness, there was nothing to contradict them in the article of grooming. There was no great observance of the usual etiquette between master and domestic; and indeed if there was any trace of subordination it appeared on the wrong side; a considerate allowance, no doubt, for untutored simplicity, though evil-minded persons had been known to say that it arose from certain apprehensions of how far those wild eyes might have observed matters not intended for them. Be that as it may, Mr. Cheek spoke in the pleasant tone which we sometimes adopt towards housekeepers of another breed.

“Why my good Nelly,” he said, “where have you been all this time?”

We will not endeavour to describe Nelly’s woodland language by the spelling, for her manner was seldom of a nature to tempt it. Her character was serious, and very often sad; in addition to which she just now showed indications of suppressed resentment.

“I have been where you sent me,” she replied: “to the public-house for this bottle of gin.”

“Very good, Nelly. I was only afraid something

had happened to you, for you have been gone these two hours."

"I dare say." Nelly was not profuse of respectful additions, which she only applied where she thought them due. "I have been on the bridge, talking to my little brother."

"What, little Tom Dabchick?"

"Him as you call so."

"Why, Nelly, that's as good a name as any other; and you see I can't call him by his own, nor you neither, because your father is such an out-and-out smuggler that it would never do for a magistrate to be known to harbour his family."

"And yet nobody gave him more encouragement till he was sent to prison, and was afterwards obliged to carry on his business in another part of the country."

"That's very true, Nelly; a man must live; and your father was in want of assistance. My charity very nearly got me into trouble."

"The kegs of brandy might have got you into worse, if all the world had known as much as I do."

Mr. Cheek looked at her suspiciously.

"And what do *you* know, Nelly?"

"It don't signify."

"Why, true enough; there's nothing for you to know which all the world does not know as well; but what do you fancy?"

"I fancy that if Mrs. Toogood could see the state to which your charities bring you every night, after spending the day in sending poor people to the

round-house for being tipsy, she'd find somebody else to give away her own."

"How do you know I lay out her charities?"

"I know she trusts you to do so, that's all."

"Come, come, my good girl; something has put you out of sorts."

"Something very often does. My little brother says you threatened to beat him."

"Is that all! Can't you understand a joke? Didn't I recommend him to his place with Mrs. Bloomer, and ain't it for his advantage that I should now and then give him a word of advice?"

Nelly was not quite sure upon that subject, and answered indignantly,—"I don't like Mrs. Bloomer's place for him. I won't have him scolded and starved, and I'd take him home if I had one. But it will soon be time for the acorns and blackberries, and little Tom and I, when we minded father's hiding-place for his kegs here in the forest, have too often made ourselves comfortable under an oak tree to care much about other shelter."

"What, leave me? You've no idea of such a thing! Tom has been telling you a pack of nonsense!"

"You'll find some of it true, at any rate. He told me what the church bells have been ringing for all the afternoon."

"Why, because Mother Bloomer set them going for her return home."

"She set them going, but not for herself."

"No?—for what else?"

“For the gentleman that Miss Lucy brought from London.”

“A gentleman!” And Mr. Cheek was all attention. “What gentleman do you mean?”

“I don’t know his name, but he’s a very nice looking one; and shamed enough I was when he stopped his beautiful carriage at the door of the Longland Arms to ask his way to Oakendell.”

“To Oakendell?”

“Yes, and he chucked me a crown piece to buy a better pair of shoes for telling him.”

“What did he want at Oakendell?”

“The bar-maid said his servant had told her that Mrs. Toogood’s servant had told him that the new gentleman was come to live there.”

“Live there! will he! I should like to see him! Who’s to live there without leave of the agent? and that’s me! Who else can let it to him?”

“Nobody, I suppose, except the owner, and that’s Miss Lucy. So, if you’re thinking about her, as everybody says you are, you had better make haste.”

If Nelly wished to retort the discomposure which Cheek had caused her brother, she could not have done it more effectually. It did not seem to concern her much, for she went on to say that the stranger was gone to look at the place, and she hoped it would suit him, because it would be handy for Miss Lucy, and because the servant had said he was very rich, and Mrs. Toogood’s nephew.”

“Mrs. Toogood’s nephew!” It was an awkward climax. “I don’t believe a word of it, for I saw

her this afternoon, and she said nothing about nephews! As for his seeing the place, old mother Rokins daren't show it without my order!"

"Not unless she has Miss Lucy's."

Mr. Cheek had very quickly bubbled up to a boiling heat, and he bounced from his chair to the great risk of his tumbler.

"Get out of the way!" he exclaimed. "Where's my hat? I must go and see about this."

"If the gentleman should come whilst you're away, what am I to tell him?"

"Tell him not to bother!" And he pushed her aside and stamped out of the room.

But he was not destined to go far. When he banged open his front door he found a man standing before it and feeling for a bell or a knocker, for which he might have felt a long time. His back being to the sky, and his front in deep shadow, there was no making out who or what he was, except that he was taller and broader than any one in the village.

With his usually urbane manner, when pressed for time and provokingly arrested, he demanded—"Who the devil are you?"

The shadow replied in a calm, deep voice,—"You had better look at me and see. I've had so many names that I don't know which is my own. But I know yours, though I have not seen you for a good while. How are you, Squire Christopher Cheek, since we parted a dozen years ago?"

Whatever it was, there was something that very much startled Mr. Cheek in this address. His face,

which had before been pale with rage, was now pale with panic, and he almost tumbled backward for something to support him.

“Bless me!” continued the shadow, “I come too suddenly! You thought me dead, perhaps, for old acquaintance are not apt to be so long out of sight.”

Cheek turned his eyes over his shoulder, and there was Nelly just behind him.

“Hullo!” he gasped, “what are you doing here? Go along to the kitchen and mind your business.”

The girl looked in great astonishment, but did as she was bidden.

“Aaron Daunt!” he resumed, quite out of breath, “I never thought to see your face again! I could never find a soul who knew what had become of you!”

“Indeed, Mr. Cheek! It was very good of your worship to make so many enquiries. I should hardly have thought myself worth the trouble.”

If a slight mixture of irony might have been traceable, Mr. Cheek did not think fit to notice it, and showed how far it was misapplied.

Aaron followed him into his parlour, where the light had remained burning. His height was six feet and two or three inches more, and his figure was broad and brawney in proportion, though nothing but huge bones and tawney skin, of which the motley covering was in the rudest style of destitution. Of his face there was not much to say, for it seemed never to have been shaved, and not very

recently washed ; but it had a resolute dash—jeering and defiant, which was more especially expressed in a pair of fierce black eyes. He might have been forty years old or thereabouts, and as he flung himself into a chair and threw what had once been a fur cap upon the table, the lines of toil and trouble bore witness that fortune had jolted him on her roughest road. Few people would have envied Mr. Cheek the possession of such a friend ; but, to be original, there is no accounting for tastes. He had done his best to recover his presence of mind, though his wrinkled countenance still looked as if it had been carved out of chalk.

“Take something to drink, Aaron, before you say a word, for you seem to have come a long way.”

He filled his big tumbler to the brim, and it was quite as quickly empty.

“And now,” he said, resuming his place, “where have you been all these years, and how is it that I see you in such miserable plight ?”

“Well, Mr. Cheek, it is quite a comfort to see an old friend so anxious about me. I dare say you have often seen me in your dreams since that last parting ?”

“Don’t allude to that, don’t. There were circumstances which remain as much a mystery as ever, and will remain so always. It is a painful subject, and there’s no good in referring to it.”

“May be not, at this moment. Is Mr. Downton’s nephew alive—Captain Samuel Cox ?”

“Not that I know of. I have not seen him these

twelve years. Take another glass whilst I get you something to eat."

"Aye, that will be something new. It is many a day since I was asked to eat and drink. Look at my bones. There's more hard work there than meat and drink. And the carrion crow that picked them was that same Captain Cox. I'll tell you more about it when I'm not famished."

"We'll bring you round, Aaron; we'll bring you round."

"Will you?" he replied, as if he took the words in some sense of his own, "we shall see."

Mr. Cheek left the room on his hospitable mission. In the kitchen he found Nelly, patching up the rags of her little Tom, and a withered old woman, three parts blind, and often four parts deaf, just as the wind blew, who filled the office of cook, for which she had been qualified by many years' practice in the workhouse. Nelly did not think it necessary to rise from her chair, and Nanny Tuck, as her companion was called, was huddled half-way up the chimney, and muttering confidentially to the smoke-jack.

"Nell," said her master, "can the old woman hear to-night?"

"No," replied the housekeeper.

"Then make her understand we want some supper."

The command was received with a look of surprise that Cheek should think of supping in such company; and he seemed puzzled to account for it.

“Come,” he said, with a coaxing effort, “don’t be in the tantrums, and I’ll give you a new gown some day. That’s an old friend of mine in the parlour, who has been robbed and stripped on the highway, and obliged to borrow clothes of a scare crow. I thought he was dead years ago, and was quite as much astonished as delighted to see him. But don’t you say anything about him, d’ye hear, for it might prevent us from catching the thieves.”

The story met with as much belief as might have been expected, which Nelly proved by remarking that he looked as much afraid of his old friend, now that he appeared in skin and bone, as he did when he thought him a ghost.

“Nonsense, Nelly, great pleasure is always agitating. But, d’ye hear?”

“Yes, I hear.”

Mr. Cheek paused, as if he wished her to say more, but if more was passing in her mind she chose to keep it to herself. A physiognomist, however, might perhaps have read in her face that she feared her master might have been guilty of some great delinquency, and that this stranger knew something about it. But she was asked no more questions, under the belief, it might be, that questions are apt to create suspicions.

“Well, Nelly, shake up the old woman, and then be a good girl, and shake up a bed.”

“A bed!” repeated the girl.

“Yes—what surprises you?”

“Oh! nothing; only that in your hurry to see

the Oakendell gentleman you forgot to lock up that box you are so fond of. As this is a friend of yours perhaps he can read, that's all."

Cheek made no reply, and one stride took him back to his parlour. But all was safe. Mr. Daunt had walked too far to be curious, and the bottle had been a trusty guardian.

"Well, Mr. Cheek," he said, with an independence much at variance with his appearance, "we have a good many people to talk of; what has become of Sir Harry Longland?"

"Ah! poor Sir Harry! He went abroad, as you remember, and has never yet returned."

"Where is he?"

"I've not the slightest notion."

"Is he alive?"

"Yes, he's alive."

"How do you know?"

"Because he writes to me now and then for money."

"And how do you know where to send it?"

Mr. Cheek bore these sharp questions with a patience for which we should hardly have given him credit.

"The letters come through various banking houses, sometimes in one part of the world and sometimes in another. Sir Harry is never stationary for he has creditors everywhere."

"I must find him out, for I've something to say to him."

"Perhaps I can say it for you, Aaron, when I forward the next remittance?"

"No, would you though?" The jeering look was almost a laugh. "That's very good of you, but I should be sorry to give your worship so much trouble. Mind, you are spilling your glass. Your hand used to be more steady; and what has become of that pretty innocent little daughter? Is she with her father?"

Cheek looked more and more uneasy, busied himself in putting away his box, and seemed not to hear; but the question was repeated, "Did she go abroad with her father?"

"Eh? oh, no! I believe not; perhaps she went to him from London the other day."

"Where has she been living?"

"Where has she been living? Oh! here—here in the village—a little while ago."

"What, with her uncle, Mr. Bloomer?"

"Yes, with Mr. Bloomer, of course."

"He is still living then?"

"Yes, oh, yes! he's living."

"I'm glad of it. I must go and see him."

"It's of no use, Aaron. He won't know you. He has quite lost his faculties by hard drinking."

"Perhaps the young lady may have a better memory."

There was a long uncomfortable pause, which Aaron interrupted by enquiring what his worship was dreaming about.

"Dreaming? Oh, only wondering what you can have been doing all these years."

"Is that all? Well, I'll tell you: you have not forgotten, I dare say, that I was Mr. Downton's——"

Cheek make an uneasy movement. "Don't speak of that man—I cannot endure his name!"

"I'm not surprised."

"He was the ruin of poor Sir Harry!"

"Oh, that's the reason? Well, there's no mistake there. But if you don't like to hear about him, we'll take a step further back and then a step further on. People have often wondered who I may chance to be, but no one has wondered half so much as I myself. There's a story of a flock of peewits being seen rather more than forty years ago, by the jockey boys at exercise on Newmarket Heath. Not knowing what the screaming and pouncing down upon a particular spot could mean, they rode up to see; and there they found a red cloak with a baby wrapped up in it—a piece of luggage rather too cumbersome for some pretty gypsy who had been telling fortunes at the races, just over. Somebody took me up and cantered me over to the training stables, and I turned out a good horseman from that first lesson. They made me a nest in the hayloft, and fed me upon oat-meal gruel and bran-mashes, and when I got to be five stone, I was celebrated amongst the feather weights."

"Wonderful," said Cheek, who was thinking intently upon something else.

"Wasn't it? The first great race I won was for Mr. Downton, whose colt was good enough to run away with me and make my fortune. His master was so taken with my jockeyship and promising stable education, such as lying, swearing, and swaggering, that he took me to his own private establish-

ment, where worse example made a better man of me, and raised me from a squalid young rascal to a respectable man of confidence. It was about that time that you used to see me here, when Mr. Downton came down to visit Sir Harry, and, as I afterwards found out, to ruin him; and now we arrive at a period which you don't like to talk about."

"No, Aaron, no," replied his worship, not altogether deceived by a hollow joviality through which he was conscious of a glance of over-much observation. "No—pass that by."

"As you please, sir—the rest of my story is not very long, though it goes just round the world. From Mr. Downton I went to his nephew, Captain Cox. The nephew was quite as fast upon the turf as the uncle had been, and used to take me the round of all the races to help him make his book and collect his bets. Some paid, and some didn't, but all swore they did, and I was accused of turning a few hundreds to my own account which I had never received. Well, what do you think he did? Of course, this is the first time you ever heard of it? He had me up before a judge and jury, and transported me for ten years!"

"You! Transport you! Why didn't you apply to me for a character?"

"Aye," said Aaron, "an oversight, wasn't it? I knew I was not guilty and was fool enough to think that sufficient; but if honesty failed to do me a good turn then, we'll trust her for a better before we are much older. Your worship does not understand, and there's no great reason that

you should. But look you to the large amount of debts I have collected since Captain Cox sent me across the world to search for them! In not one item of which shall I be found a defaulter! Look you to the chains about my wrists; the links to thieves and cutthroats; the community with shame and devilry; the wrench from the land I loved, though it gave me small cause, but the fair character I had earned in it. Look you to ten years of slavery, for one who would not have sold an hour of freedom for an age of gold! Look you—I could say, but that a convict's brain must not look back—to the state of one who howled to change natures with the dog that bayed the moon! These are rich entries in my long account! Add them together and tell me the amount of ten years' daily collection. I've brought it all; all carefully invested in these fingers; and all to be delivered. Ha, ha! You cannot make me out! We learn a strange way of talking on that other side of the world; and are better understood by what we do than what we say."

Mr. Cheek's presence of mind was not much improved by this wild talk; but while he was stammering his astonishment, Nelly came to his aid with a smoking dish, and the conversation naturally took another channel.

CHAPTER IX.

MANY girls in Nelly's position, and under the odd circumstances, might have allowed their curiosity to take some liberties with the key-hole ; but in her case there was too much instinctive pride for the perpetration of anything that might bring her to shame, and too much occasion to think of her own prospects for any desire to trouble her head with the goings on of other people, when they were not forced upon her. What she knew of Cheek already was more than she wanted to know, and what she had just witnessed was enough to convince her that nothing better was to be looked for. It seemed ominous of some shadow upon that never very promising roof which must drive her and the urchin, for whom she was still and always using her spare moments, once more to the wild woods, to live as the birds did, but without their wings to fly from the bitter winter. They had no other resource. They had no mother to go to, and their father was too much engaged in a nefarious life by the sea, and daily escapes from justice to remember their existence, since he had placed them in their present

homes. Other service was hopeless, with such recommendations, and the labour of the fields after what she had seen of the village girls and their clowns with whom it would mingle them, was worse than starvation ; for Nelly, under all her disadvantages, was a moral and good girl.

Amidst these melancholy thoughts and a silence only broken by the passing of her thread through the homely material she worked upon—for old Nanny was dead asleep—she was disturbed by a low tap at the entrance door. She knew it to be the tap of the vicar, for she had heard it too often and had too often had occasion to pity the consequence of his visits to her master. For this night, at least, there was a hope of sending him home in a state less lamentable, and she stole silently to the door to send him away with the information that Mr. Cheek was engaged. But the vicar, in his quiet tremulous accent, assured her that he did not mean to stay more than a minute, and had been sent by Mrs. Bloomer on something very particular. Doubting whether she was right or wrong, Nelly reluctantly opened the parlour door and ushered in the portly ruin of the Reverend Mr. Bloomer.

Cheek staggered out of his chair with a confused and disconcerted look, as if this unexpected meeting of his two friends were the last thing on earth he desired. For, independent of the conversation that would most probably ensue and which he had shown so much anxiety to prevent, it required no small adroitness to shape his own in such a fashion as might secure him from evil construction on both

sides. The task, indeed, as regarded the lynx-eyed Aaron, was next to impossible, and therefore his only hope was to make sure of the purblind vicar, and shut up his eyes before they had time to make unpleasant recognitions.

“How do you do, Mr. Bloomer?” he said, with the bland reception, very proper for the venerable pastor. “This is just like your benevolent care for your flock. Pray take a seat in this easy chair; and as you could not have failed to wet your feet in crossing my yard, oblige me by drinking this glass of weak spirits and water which I was just mixing for myself.”

“Thanks, Mr. Cheek,” replied the feeble Mr. Bloomer, “you are always so hospitable! But I fear I interrupt——”

“Oh, nothing of the kind! This is an excellent friend of mine who has just escaped some perilous adventures by sea, and has no business except with his supper, to which I hope he will attend without minding us. Your Reverence will set him a good example by taking your glass.”

His Reverence meekly took the hint which he would perhaps not have required had he not been fixed in a gaze of wonderment on the excellent friend, whom of course there was no danger of his recognising through such a forest of hair and tatters.

“I beg to drink my service to you, sir,” he said, “and congratulate you on your escape, which appears to have been very miraculous.”

Aaron thanked him with much more respect than

he had displayed hitherto, and resumed his very necessary employment with an expression of concern for the poor old man, so woefully altered since they had last met. He made no attempt to recall himself to his memory, for which the presence of Mr. Cheek seemed undesirable, and continued his meal in silence, though in close observance of what passed.

“That is a very genuine spirit,” resumed his Reverence, after he had duly qualified himself to judge. “Very soothing to the nerves, that I have found so excitable during the last few years.”

“I am delighted to perceive it, Mr. Bloomer. A sudden access of pleasure arising from the return of Mrs. Bloomer is very likely to have caused a return of the palpitation you have so often complained of. Allow me to pour a small drop more into your glass. We must take care of you, my dear sir, for it is a great blessing to spend a profitable hour with you after devoting a whole day to people whose thoughts are fixed on this world only.”

Aaron looked up from his plate with a smile of disdain; but the Vicar’s perceptions were not so acute.

“Ah,” replied his Reverence, “I’m afraid there are too many such persons. All we can do is to pray for better things.”

“I assure you, worthy sir, I do pray for better things, very devoutly.”

“No doubt—no doubt. When one sees your exemplary attention to divine service one cannot

help wondering how there can be a failing Christian about us. But it is a wide subject, and your mention of Mrs. Bloomer reminds me that I am sent upon a little matter of more temporal concern."

"Excuse me, Mr. Bloomer, your temporal concerns are the duty of your flock. You have too much to do with your spiritual ones to give a thought to them; and if your constitution were to break down, heaven only knows what would become of us."

"I do my best, Mr. Cheek; I do my best; that certainly is a very good glass of spirits."

"It won't hurt you. It is very old, and the strength has quite evaporated. Suffer me to pour in a leetle more, for you can hardly taste it."

"Thank you; I do my best."

"If we might judge from your discourse last Sunday, your best gets better and better."

"Does it indeed! I'm glad you think so, for I have a great reliance on your opinion. I feared I was failing a little. Mrs. Bloomer thinks I should do better without this restorative, and that I ought to take nothing but water."

"Ah, Mrs. Bloomer is an excellent lady, and water is certainly very good—in its way; but your Reverence has often told us from the pulpit that all the blessings of this life are of a mingled nature, for fear we should grow too fond of them. As I never forget what you say, I think, with submission, that we are bound to mix water, like the rest, with a

dash of juniper, or something of that kind, to prevent excess."

"True, Mr. Cheek, very true. You are very attentive—an exemplary Christian." With which the good man disposed of half his second tumbler, and Cheek persisted for a mortal half-hour in fencing off the object of the visit; but he did not succeed in the end, for the Vicar was as much afraid to return home without delivering his message as his friend was determined not to hear it, till the mystifying effects of gin-and-water had made the needful preparation.

After very many indistinct repetitions of "Mrs. Bloomer—commissioned me—something—don't exactly remember—'bout tithes," Mr. Cheek seemed to think he might venture to attend to it.

"Tithes! Oh, yes, of course! I don't know where I should go to if I were ungrateful enough to forget the tithes. I've a litter of ten beautiful little pigs, and Mrs. Bloomer shall have her tenth to-morrow morning, all ready for the bakehouse. Perhaps your Reverence will have the goodness to say so, with my respectful compliments."

"Yes, thank 'ee—if I don't forget—I'm very forgetful." And he put the tumbler again to his lips and turned it bottom upwards. "Thank 'ee—I won't take any more."

And truly there was no need for more!

Mr. Cheek then drew out his pocket-book and wrote, with a pleasant smile, "Received this 30th of July, the amount of tithes due to me from Christopher Cheek, Esq." To which Mr. Bloomer,

unmindful of a large amount of arrears, affixed his hardly legible signature.

“And now,” he attempted to say, “think Mrs. Bloomer—niece Lucy—wonder where I’ve got to—says that always lose tithes coming home—take care this time.”

“Yes, my dear sir; button up your pockets. You must take more care.”

“Yes—more care.”

He made an exertion to get up, but dropped down upon his seat again.

“Don’t know how it is—very infirm! Go home—correct sermon for to-morrow.”

“Ah, sure to be a stunner. I hope to see you a bishop before long! Here, Nell!”

Nelly answered the call.

“Take the lantern and see Mr. Bloomer across the yard. I’m afraid it’s a little dirty.”

“No, no,” said Aaron, rising hastily. “My arm, with your worship’s leave, can do it better, now he has such a weight of tithes to carry.”

“Lord, Aaron,” replied Cheek, with a side whisper, and an affected smile of ridicule, “can’t you see the joke?”

“No,” answered Aaron, “I’ll be shot if I can.”

“Why, it is only to show him to-morrow how easily evil-disposed persons may impose upon him, and to cure him of his bad habits. You can’t go out again to-night—you can’t indeed. You are worn out already.”

“Your worship is very considerate; but I can go

a hundred yards still. Come, Mr. Bloomer, allow me to assist you."

The old broken-down man availed himself of the offer with so much thankfulness, that Cheek could interpose no farther obstacle, and Nelly lighted them out, not unmindful of her master's look, which signified anything but concern for the renewed exertions of his highly-prized friend. When she had guided them across the yard, her consideration for the helpless vicar, and alarm at the doubtful hands to which he had confided himself, induced her to extinguish the light and follow them at a short distance. She could not, therefore, help hearing their conversation, and it tended a good deal to alter her first idea of Aaron. He performed his good office with a care and gentleness that surprised her, and his occasional words were exceedingly respectful.

"Will you please, sir, to lean a little heavier—the road is rough."

"Thank 'ee, Mr.—don't know who—I'm very weak."

"I'm very sorry to perceive it, sir—heavier, if you please."

"You are very good—very strong—that's a very—exemplary—Christian."

"Whom do you mean, sir?"

"Him—Misser Cheek—always sings the Psalms. Very liberal of his spirits—in mod-ration."

And thus they arrived at the garden entrance of the vicarage. There they found the ever-watchful Lucy, who seldom trusted her uncle out

of her sight, and had now begun to be very uneasy.

“ Oh, uncle,” she said, in a low and mournful voice, “ you promised me you would not stay a minute, and I have waited for you almost an hour.”

“ Where—where’s Mrs. Bloomer ?”

“ Gone to bed.”

“ Pro-vidence very merciful ! Mustn’t disturb her—tongue—rouse the parish.”

“ Come uncle, come in !”. And she took his vacant arm to help him to the house, where his servant was waiting to put him to bed. When they came to the light she was startled to see him under the protection of a stranger to the village, and one of such a ruffianly appearance ; but having consigned the vicar to other hands, she remained to express her thanks for the service he had received, and was taking out her purse.

“ No, Miss Longland, if I may be so bold. My blessing and my thanks ; but nothing more from the house of Sir Harry Longland.”

Lucy started, and looked him earnestly in the face.

“ What mean you ? What know you of Sir Harry ?”

“ I knew him for a noble gentleman—would to God I had not. I was servant to one who made but an ill return for his friendship.”

“ To whom ? Tell me to whom ?”

Aaron hesitated.

“ Come away from the door. This way—there—now tell me who you are.”

“ My name is Aaron Daunt.”

“ Aaron, do you say ? Aaron ? I seem to have heard that name before.”

“ You were almost an infant, Miss Longland, when you heard it last. Young enough to be borne on this arm. But I fear to tell you the name of my master, lest I share his reproach.”

“ Fear nothing, but tell me.”

“ His name was Downton.”

The perturbed expression of Lucy’s countenance became fixed and frozen, and her words were scarcely articulate.

“ For what purpose have you returned to this place ?”

“ To learn the address of Sir Harry.”

“ And for what purpose is that ?”

“ To tell him something of deep importance.”

“ Tell it to me.”

“ I cannot tell you yet. The links of my story are not complete, and I must see him. I have been in a far distant country, and it was only accident that informed me, just before I left it, of Sir Harry’s many years’ absence. I have coupled that with some strange suspicions that occurred to me about twelve years ago.”

“ Tell me, in mercy, what you mean ?”

“ It is a secret which you would naturally be unable to keep, and which, prematurely divulged, would defeat a great object.”

“ Does Mr. Cheek know it ?”

“ He does, and will keep it safe enough.”

“Your manner is friendly, but your words are terrible.”

“You shall speedily know their meaning if you will tell me where to find Sir Harry.”

“I cannot—I do not know. My father has not written to me since I was a child. My only knowledge that he lives is through his agent.”

“Do not place too much trust in that man.”

“And why not?”

“Because I believe him to be a great villain.”

“Tell me one thing, as you are human. Have I any cause to fear him?”

“None. If he dares to impress such a feeling upon you, stun him with the name of Aaron Daunt.”

He suddenly stopped to listen.

“I heard a step outside these palings. He is not unlikely to have followed me, and he must know nothing of this conversation. To-morrow I shall be gone, but will soon return, when you shall know all. Heaven guard you, Miss Longland !”

He pulled off his cap with deep respect, and was gone. Of Lucy's astonishment we need say nothing.

When Aaron regained the mansion of Mr. Cheek, he found that gentleman waiting impatiently at the door, for fear, as he said, that he had lost his way; but he answered that he had only been looking about to recall old scenes, and walked into the room where he had left the bottle with the air of a person who felt himself quite at home.

Mr. Cheek inquired, after some hesitation, whether he had seen any of his family.

“Only a young girl,” he replied, “who took the Vicar off my hands, and was frightened at my gibbet-look. Your worship must help me to a refit from some of your own stores; as you seem to like them too long for you, perhaps I may not find them much too short. I shall want a razor too, and a pound or two of soap, and a few bank notes, or I shall hardly be a credit to you.”

Aaron must indeed have been wonderfully welcome, for Cheek had never been so obliging; though it was a peculiarity of his smile that it sometimes resembled a flash from a thundercloud. It was not very different when Nelly brought him a letter, which, as he read it, seemed to make the cloud still blacker.

“Is there any answer?” asked Nelly.

“No!” replied a roaring clap; and his worship crammed the fuse into his pocket, with a turbulent effort to look serene. If he could not quite succeed it was certainly an evening of provocations, for the letter ran as follows:—

“Mr. Crowley begs to inform Mr. Cheek that he has engaged Oakendell House, with the land and shooting attached, from Miss Longland, and will be obliged by the removal of the live stock and farming materials belonging to Mr. Cheek as early as convenient on Monday morning.”

We might have thought, from the manner of its

perusal, that it involved considerations of more importance than pigs and bullocks, but guesses are often wrong, and always perplexing, and we have quite enough to do in admiring the extreme urbanity with which Mr. Cheek conducted Aaron to his dormitory, after which, we are sorry to say, he was in no mood to retire to rest, but paced his room heavily backwards and forwards during the whole night.

CHAPTER X.

NOTWITHSTANDING his improved spirits on the preceding evening, Crowley made his appearance in the morning as if, in imitation of Mr. Cheek's bottle, their strength had much evaporated. His rest had not been much to speak of. It had been a great satisfaction to him that honest Tom Philpot, by a clever misrepresentation that such arrangements were perfectly regular, had prevailed on Lucy to accept his year's rent in advance; but then the more he saw of the said Tom the less became his first confidence that there was no danger in him. He had found him a great deal too good-hearted to be trustworthy, and the graces he wanted were not likely to be missed by eyes which had never seen such attractions. The worst of it was that, though there was abundance of simplicity, there was no vulgarity. A little of this, like a little alloy in gold, would have been a great acquisition; but Tom appeared to be pure ore, and malleable into anything. He was, moreover, sensible, when he was not ashamed to be so; whereas it was an important desideratum that he should be a blockhead. There

was no saying but Mrs. Toogood might have been correct in her suspicions. There was no argument against it, except that she was sure of it ; and upon this equivocal comfort Mr. Crowley joined her at breakfast.

The ceremony over, Mrs. Toogood thought dear James would like to get ready for church ; for dear James, we are sorry to say, had forgotten it was Sunday—a day which, with some compunction, he had generally passed at his club, or rather late in his bed, because his friends did so, considering its business the peculiar province of their mothers and sisters. To go to church was now a part of his new life, and he made it a point to do his duty.

The carriage was soon at the door, and moving churchward at a pace suited to the gravity of the day. If there was anything out of keeping it was perhaps a slight smile, at what Pall Mall might say if it saw him in a comfortable old coach, beside a respectable old lady, on his way to grow good. What pleasant comments would it make on the fat coachman and footman who overlapped the hammer cloth on both sides, and what comical questions of how the fat old horses, which found it so hard to waddle down hill would ever contrive to waddle up again !

The bells—two sharps and a flat—had long been exerting their ting, tang, tack to summon sinners and sweethearts, and gaffers and dames who had once been choice examples to both parties ; and the call on this fine morning was answered with more than common alacrity. It had been spread abroad

by Mrs. Bloomer that the fine gentleman she had imported from London would be exhibited in Mrs. Toogood's pew, and every tomb-stone was taken for the spectacle—every “rude forefather of the hamlet” seemed to stand erect upon his green hillock in the form of a fat sheep.

Crowley and his aunt were the first in their places. Then came the school children, tumbling up the stairs, and heels over head, to the gallery, with an old woman and a long stick behind them. Then the parish penitents, looking as innocent as the patriarchs bleating without, and wonderfully well behaved, seeing that they only practised manners once a week ; and then, at intervals, dropped in the aristocracy.

Foremost of these was Mr. Christopher Cheek, consulting the stones as usual upon the praiseworthy question of how to make the rest of the world as good as himself. He took his seat close under the pulpit, and having plumped down upon his knees and crammed his face into his hat, in which he was perhaps reminded that patent silk was price four shillings and sixpence, staggered up again and began to thumb his hymn-book.

By another door glided in two ladies, one in her bloom and very pretty, the same who had been Lucy's companion on the previous evening, the other tall and yellow, with a drooping pair of eye-lids and a head gear on one side, as we have seen it in prints of operatic pastoral. She was at the turning point of beauty's prime, which has such a woeful propensity to turn the wrong way, and her cast of

features bore strong reference to the synagogue. These ladies, Mrs. Toogood whispered, were Miss Mary Lightfoot and Miss Penelope Pinhorn, commonly called half sisters, though, owing to sundry zig-zag parental marriages, no relations.

Not far behind the latter, followed the flaky locks and flabby face of a bulbous gentleman in black, with a turn-down shirt collar, and apparent ambition to resemble a sleepy lion ; though the big black eyes were more like a pair of ravens at roost. This was the donkey's godfather, Mr. Fozzard, a recent acquisition of the village from some region unknown.

Hard by was a precise little gentleman in dapper fittings of the same grave hue, and a neat white tie with an exquisite little bow which unmistakably advertised "Prescriptions carefully made up." This was Mr. Choke, the apothecary, on whose first-floor lodged the sleepy lion.

Near him, in green and brimstone and gilt buttons, and in imminent danger both of strangulation from his neck-cloth and a stab from his breast pin, was the rosy and right honest Squire Thomas Philpot.

There was not much else of importance till a private door opened and Lucy Longland followed the flaming folds of Mrs. Bloomer into the vicarage pew, where the first dropped meekly on her knees, and the second elevated her downy chin to observe the effect produced on that benighted community by the last London fashions.

Whilst Crowley was stealing a perilous glance at the kneeling figure, the vicar, with his red face much redder for the white surplice, tottered into the reading desk, and the singers lifted up their voices as if an ill-assorted pack had suddenly started a hare. The two or three in tune could make but little head against the twenty that were out; but there was this consolation, that if the latter were not likely to draw down the seraphs, their yells and contortions, with Mr. Cheek at the head, were quite enough to scare away an intruder who sometimes goes to church as well as everywhere else.

We pass over the service with a feeling of regret, and would have passed over Mr. Bloomer's first appearance in this history had subsequent events permitted us, for he was a good man, though weighed down by one heavy reproach. But as we have known many a good man weighed down by a dozen, we had rather look on him with pity than condemnation. We had rather plead what set-off we can in a disposition too yielding by nature and urged on by trials, which would probably have made our own sins a great deal the worst. Though his shattered intellect had long given ground for severe remark, it would have been hard to find a heart in the parish disposed to indulge in it. His helpless efforts to do his duty drew down no criticism beyond a common sorrow that, week by week, he was becoming less capable of it; and as village tongues could spare him we hope for charity else-

where. We must let this short appeal supply the place of both prayers and sermon.

On the present occasion there were more indications of concern than usual. The vicar's manner was more dreamy and his articulation less perfect, and his look was distressed and confused, with evident consciousness of something worse coming on. He often lost his place, and had many repetitions to make before he could recover it. Finally he lost it altogether, and was driven to a hasty and less audible conclusion, from which it would have been hard to extract any meaning.

The eyes of Lucy had never moved from him. They could see deeper than the rest of the congregation, and were trembling with tearful apprehension. Crowley's were fixed with the same momentary expectation of some more than ordinary event; and having previously arranged with his aunt that he should escape through a side door to elude Mrs. Bloomer and her threatened introductions, remained in his place till the church was cleared of all but the clerk and the two objects of his interest. He then rose, and passing down the aisle, slowly and more uneasy at seeing no sign of Mr. Bloomer's descent from the pulpit, came to Lucy, who had been remaining, as was her custom, to conduct her uncle home. She was gazing at the narrow stairs in great trepidation, and he stopped to whisper a hope that nothing was the matter. She could restrain her anxiety no longer, and sprang up to ascertain the cause of delay, which she announced with a thrilling cry. The vicar was leaning back in his seat, and to

all appearance lifeless; but Crowley was immediately by her side, and though scarcely less startled and almost as ignorant of what should be done, seized the old man's pulse and arrested her despair by the assurance that he was not dead. He was not one to lose his wits in extremities, and saw at a glance that the seizure must be either apoplexy or paralysis, and that the first consideration was to prevent a general alarm. The clerk, and his own groom who had been waiting for orders at the side entrance, were the only witnesses of the scene, and he immediately made the best use of them both. The first he sent off for the medical man, and the other, with his fleet pair of horses, to the county town for the best physician to be found.

The few moments of suspense were truly piteous. The vicar's eyes continued closed as if he were in profound sleep, and his limbs were motionless, except, from time to time, a convulsive start, whilst the veins in his temples were black and distended almost to bursting. Lucy was unconsciously supported by all the care that could be spared from her uncle, and the tears that streamed silently down her bloodless cheeks seemed a farewell to her last hope on earth. Neither of them spoke, for one was unable to speak, and the other was too eagerly intent upon the door by which he looked for assistance. Presently the messenger returned, and with him the village apothecary, whom we have before described. Fortunately, he was no bad specimen of his calling, and was more disposed to be useful than

talkative. He had gained a hasty knowledge of the particular necessity for him on his way, and had given his companion a few instructions, so that he had scarcely cast a look of alarm upon his patient when materials were handed to him for instant operation, and before answering a question he had opened a vein in the temple. The effect seemed better than his expectations. As the blood burst forth he turned to Lucy and said, "I think we are just in time."

"Are you sure? I conjure you, are you sure?"

"I hope so, but I must have assistance."

"My servant is gone for the nearest," said Crowley.

"To Lympton? Ten miles off. I hope we shall hold out."

The bleeding produced more signs of life, though none of consciousness, but it was time to stop it, and convey the scarcely-living old man to his home. For this purpose a litter was easily improvised by one of the church benches, with cushions from the pews; and Crowley supporting the principal weight and the doctor guiding the feet, he was borne down from the pulpit and placed in proper position. The clerk preceded them to warn the servants to make no commotion, and Lucy followed the slow transit. No one else perceived it, and as Mrs. Bloomer had occupation enough till the afternoon in spreading her London news through the whole circle of her acquaintance, there was not much fear of intrusion.

Having lifted their stricken burthen upon his bed

and dimmed the light to that sickly shade which many of us have such sad reason to remember, they sat in breathless contemplation of every change of feature which seemed equally fraught with life or death, and silently counted the seconds through two-unchangeful hours.

By that time the doctor arrived. He was highly esteemed through the country and well-known at the Vicarage from former claims upon his skill. He likewise carried with him what is often the physician's best medicine—a hopeful countenance and a decisive manner which inspired confidence and cure where the doubting solemnity of a by-gone generation would have pronounced a sentence. He looked long and attentively at the Vicar without disturbing him by a touch, and then motioned the apothecary to the further end of the room where he talked earnestly for some minutes, turning his eye once or twice upon Crowley, who naturally, as a stranger in the house, felt diffident of interfering. In the end he was invited, with Lucy, to join in the consultation.

“Miss Longland,” said the doctor, “the case is apoplexy, as my friend here pronounced it, but be assured that it is not hopeless. The bleeding has, I trust, saved your uncle's life; and, in that case, you owe it in the first instance to the self-possession and prompt proceedings of this gentleman. Had a moment been lost, all aid would have been too late.”

Maiden reserve has no chill to oppose to the warm flood of gratitude, and the hand which was not ex-

tended to Crowley yesterday now clasped his unexpecting one with a fervour that made it hard to control his own. The doctor was not slow to perceive that he should leave his patient in keeping which was not likely to fail from want of harmony, to secure which he had some collateral motives not strictly medical. He had known Lucy from a child, and all her history, and in his drives from Lympton he had learnt something of Crowley from his groom, which in the course of consultation led to recommendations he might not otherwise have thought of.

“There are only one or two things,” he said, “which at all disturb my hopes of Mr. Bloomer’s recovery, and the first of these is the difficulty of providing in this neighbourhood the sort of society which I think most important for the restoration of his faculties. With all the tastes and acquirements of a gentleman, he has, for years, not had a gentleman near him, and the consequent stagnation of mind has no inlet for renewed circulation, which, in this case, is quite as much to be thought of as the circulation of the blood. The exchange of ideas and feelings to what he was always accustomed to would act as we have often seen a return to his native climate act upon a dying man by restoring him to health ; and, therefore, Mr. Crowley, I am sure you will pardon me for inquiring whether your stay in this part of the country is likely to afford a hope that you will sometimes look in upon him. It would indeed be a mercy if you could do so very often.”

"Certainly," replied Crowley, "as often as I am permitted. Nothing would make me so happy."

Lucy looked, she knew not how, but the doctor did.

"This," he continued, "is a great point gained; but there is still another in relation to nurses. I can approve of none that are not perfectly devoted to their task, and I know of no one in whom I can trust but Miss Longland. To Mrs. Bloomer I have a strong objection, which I hope she will forgive, on the ground of its being highly complimentary—the brilliant powers of conversation, which everybody knows to be unrestrainable, would be the death of him in five minutes, and we cannot afford to lose him, even with excess of pleasure; but as the communication may be painful, and the doctor may have the most authority, I will stay till she comes home, and make it myself."

As the lady had been a long time absent, Crowley thought she might return very soon, and that he had best not intrude himself upon a conference so confidential. With a strong opinion therefore of the doctor's great sagacity, he begged, and received permission, to renew his attentions as soon as the first shock might be over, and presently took his leave.

CHAPTER XI.

THE sudden illness of the Vicar was not known in the village till the time had arrived for evening service, when the unusual silence of the church bell caused inquiries that drew as large a congregation as had thirsted for absolution in the morning. The clerk now made the melancholy communication that all comfort for the rural sinners was postponed till he could not exactly say when, which indicated a period of much increased necessity. The spiritual deprivation was, we hope, becomingly regretted, but there were other considerations amongst the deprived which had doubtless some weight. Though few of the congregation were capable of perceiving Mr. Bloomer's incapacity for the office he filled, there was, as we have intimated, a very general appreciation of his worth, and the benevolent indulgence with which he had always tempered his pastoral advice. Reproach being no more feared from his scrutiny than thunder from a sunbeam, they looked upon him more as a sleeping partner in their errings and strayings than a stern creditor for reformation, and remembered

that when the old familiar face should no longer look upon them, there was no saying what sort of a face might succeed it.

And so the good people adjourned their devotions by twos and threes to the contemplation of the scene of this melancholy disaster, till one and all were assembled in front of the Vicarage. Just then arrived the good Christian and punctual attendant, Mr. Cheek, to be horrified more than all the rest, and no less astonished as to what could possibly have been the cause of a visitation so unforeseen. He was very soon to be informed, and to share his information with the public.

Making his way through the throng, after the manner of a billiard ball on a series of cannons which his friendly anxiety might render excusable, he bustled through the garden gate and pulled the house bell with the haste and authority of a gentleman at his own door, with a mad bull behind him. Mrs. Bloomer, who had been at home some time, flung up a window and answered him herself.

“ My goodness, gracious, mercy on me ! ” she cried at the top of her voice, “ who’s that making such an abominable noise at the door of a sick house ? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, whoever you are ! ”

“ My good lady, it is me, Christopher Cheek. I have only just heard the lamentable—— ”

“ Go along about your business, and hear the rest from all the parish ! Get along and hear it is all your own doing, and learn to pay your tithes like an honest man, and not out of the gin bottle ! Ain’t you ashamed to be cheating a man out of receipts

for the last seven years when he doesn't know what he's about, and now to come here with your blustering make-believe to kill him outright?"

"But, my dear Mrs.—"

"Go along! I say, and cajole those who don't know you. You are known a great deal too well here, and we don't want any more of you!"

"But you mistake, I assure you. Poor dear Mr. Bloomer—"

"Get along with your assurance! Get along with your mistakes! Get along with your poor dear Mr. Bloomers! If you want to know any more, he is dying, and it's you that have killed him!"

And, with that, down came the window with the chop of a guillotine, as if the crime were expiated on the spot.

Mr. Cheek stood for an amazed moment, looking right and left for his senses, and was then about to step briskly homeward, as if he suddenly recollected where he had left them, when, to make matters worse, Crowley chanced to arrive again with a heavy load of condolence from Mrs. Toogood. Mrs. Bloomer saw him come down the garden walk, and up went the window a second time. The exclamations of welcome with which he was received formed so strong a contrast to the repulse of Mr. Cheek, that the juveniles at the gate, who had not forgotten old scores, and were in ecstasie at hearing Cheek "catch it" himself, set up a very loud and unfeeling shout of laughter. Again it burst forth, as Mrs. Bloomer ran down stairs and admitted her second visitor with her own hands, which slammed the door in the face

of her first. And again, as Mr. Cheek turned round to annihilate the offenders with his brace of visual revolvers, the shrill lungs gave another sample of their training in the crow-field, which made it rather difficult for him to maintain his dignity, and also to moderate the amount of his obligations to the Vicaress and her interloper, the latter of whom had really no particular claim to them, seeing that he was led into the parlour with no thought of anything but how to get out of it.

"Gracious me," exclaimed the gratified Mrs. Bloomer, "I hardly flattered myself that Mr. Crowley would compliment me with a visit so very soon; but the truth is you knew how very much your condolence would comfort me. Take a seat, my dear Mr. Crowley, and I'll sit close by you, and tell you all that has happened since you were here in the morning; only, if you please, we must speak in whispers, because they say there must not be a voice heard."

And with that she elevated the chin which we have before admired, and squeezed her eyelids together, as if she were taking aim at him down the line of her nose, at the same time edging her chair a little closer. It was a peculiarly bewitching way she had with her favourites; but Crowley edged a little further off, and endeavoured to make her less fascinating and more communicative, by asking if any change had taken place in the Vicar.

"Ah me! I'm sure I have not the smallest idea, for you will hardly believe that I am in future to depend upon you for that information, instead of

giving it. All I know is that Mr. Bloomer ought to have been contented with the blessings bestowed upon him, without taking to bad habits, which made him forget them; for you have seen how very great a disparity there is between us, and have no idea what offers I rejected for his sake, and then to go and kill himself and lose the living, and leave me with nothing but the fortune I brought him, and a trifling settlement! I declare if he goes off in this way it is a shame, and very unjust of him!"

And here she edged a little nearer, and Crowley a little farther.

"I hope, Mrs. Bloomer, the illness will have a happier termination. But allow me to ask how it is that you are to depend upon me for the tidings of what transpires in your own house?"

"Ah, I don't wonder you ask that, for the case is very uncommon."

And the chairs gave two more little hops, like sparrows on a house-top.

"You must know," she resumed, "that the doctor has peremptorily forbidden me to go near poor Mr. Bloomer, for fear, as he says, of my conversational powers, which he rates very far above their merits. He will allow nobody whatever to enter the room except Lucy, who, you know, has never much to say for herself, unless I can persuade *you* sometimes to sit with him. I'm afraid it is asking too much of you—oh me, I should think so. But then I am sure you will not mind straining a point to oblige *me*, who would do as much, and a great deal more, to oblige *you*."

“By all means, Mrs. Bloomer,” replied Crowley, holding his head as far back as he could, and retreating a few more inches towards the door, “I shall be most happy to do any service in my power, and, as Mrs. Toogood begged me to return immediately, perhaps I had better step upstairs at once.”

And then looking at his watch in alarm at another hop after him, he jumped up in great astonishment that Mrs. Bloomer’s powers of conversation had made him so far forget the time. The lady likewise jumped up to detain him, declaring with many protestations that he had not stayed a minute, and that their conversation had hardly begun. She had not half shown him the particular manner in which she hoped to be obliged, which was just to take a look in at the Vicar every morning, and then to assuage her great anxiety, and keep up her spirits for the rest of the day.

“You know, my dear Mr. Crowley,” and here, in pugilistic phrase, she worked round him, and insinuated her attractions between his impatience and the doorway. “You know I have no one else to depend on for a sincere opinion, for the doctor will, of course, make the matter as bad as he can, and Lucy is always in the despairing mood, and quite incapable of forming any opinion if she were not. I can assure you she is by no means the sensible girl you may have imagined from your conversation on the railway, but only just able to repeat what she has read, or what people have told her, and has never made a single observation for herself in all her

life. Poor thing, when you have seen her for half an hour you have seen everything, and the doctor, I can see, prefers her attendance to mine on the Vicar, upon the same principle that would suggest a diet of bread pudding in preference to aliment of a more generous and seasoned nature."

"I have no doubt he is quite correct, and a feeling recollection of my infancy, before modern reformations, still overcomes me with the universal adjunct to bread pudding, which was boiled flounders. The very thought blanches me into a bloodless boiled flounder myself, and therefore it is high time I should take myself away and be served up."

"Oh, ha, ha ! What a funny creature you are. But I can't laugh, for I am dreadfully unhappy, and shall be so impatient for your daily visit that—ah, me ! don't step back, or you'll tumble over the stool—that—that—I really forgot what I was going to say, except that I look to you entirely to advise me what had better become of me in case anything should happen to Mr. Bloomer, for nothing could be more sad than to be left alone, just in the prime of my life, a poor, disconsolate—"

"Upon my life, Mrs. Bloomer," interrupted Crowley, stepping over the stool, in mortal terror of what was coming next in the way of provisional arrangements. "Upon my word I shall not be able to see Mr. Bloomer at all, unless you allow me to go at once, for I have not another moment to spare."

"Patience me, that's always the case with you gentlemen ! You are always in such a breathless hurry. But if you must go, pray don't stay long,

and I'll wait for you at the foot of the stairs, and walk with you as far as Mrs. Toogood's, and then you can give me your advice, for you've no notion how exceedingly unhappy I am."

"Yes, yes, I know," replied Crowley, making a desperate effort at the handle of the door, and letting out half of himself.

"And pray, my dear Mr. Crowley, send Lucy down to me directly, for she'll only be in your way, and I've something very particular to tell her."

"Of course, of course!" and at last he succeeded in screwing out his other half.

He tapped very gently at the Vicar's door, and it was opened by Lucy, not pale as he had left her, but blushing with pleasure at his return.

"He is better," she whispered, with that taper little finger at her lips. "So much better, that all immediate danger has passed away. He must have been partly conscious before you left, for he has been looking about as if he missed you, and has tried to speak. Look, he is now in a quiet sleep."

He entered the room, and closed the door without a sound. The doctor had gone away during his interview with Mrs. Bloomer, and left him so fair a field for a more dangerous one, that, in this early stage of his acquaintance, he scarcely knew whether he might presume to stay; but Lucy was more aware of her obligations to him, and too sensible of her need for more, to give way to the natural confusion of a situation so unusual, and she did not forget that he came by authority. She seemed likewise to hesitate with something farther to say, and

etiquettes gave place, and so did Mrs. Bloomer's injunctions, whilst they seated themselves side by side, and were driven—as it were by fate—into a first confidential conversation.

In answer to his apology for so soon intruding again, and his plea of a commission from Mrs. Bloomer, she replied that he had waited for no commission to aid her in extremity, and that none could be required for looking on the good he had done. "That would be strange, Mr. Crowley; as strange—almost—as that I should owe so much to one whom I never saw till yesterday."

"Forgive me for reminding you that some yesterdays are divided from to-days by years."

"I do not need it: I will prove that I do not; for I am meditating a request which could only be excused on acquaintance of a much longer date. You have probably heard from Mrs. Toogood the almost friendless situation in which I am placed, and peculiar fates will perhaps plead for peculiar resources. I have thought and hesitated much within this hour, and have been forced to the conclusion that I know no one to whom I can appeal in this trying emergency. Mrs. Toogood—will you pardon me?—has the kindest—the only heart to which I can look for counsel, but—"

"But you know it is the last in the world to depend on."

"My aunt—"

"Your aunt—I, too, must speak in confidence—is out of the question."

"I have only one other friend—a very dear one—"

Crowley's heart beat quick. He felt he was coming to the grand mystery.

"But she is very young and inexperienced. Yes, only the dear girl you saw last night. You wonder to see me so helpless, and even she is scarcely less so, for neither of us has much hope at home, or much opportunity to seek resource in the other. And now, Mr. Crowley, look on my poor uncle, dependent upon *me*, as I have hitherto depended upon *him*. Would not this plead excuse for greater encroachment than even throwing my confidence on a stranger?"

Crowley needed some powers of restraint to keep his words within bounds, but though his language, unembarrassed by their two aunts, had a tone of interest very different from what it would have been in their presence, it was in no way different from what it might have been amongst intimate friends, and soon placed the frank and artless nature of Lucy at ease to take it up with the same forgetfulness of their newly-formed acquaintance.

"You encourage me to be explicit," she said. "I am told that though immediate danger is over, my uncle has been harassed and misled till his constitution is in danger of breaking down from other causes. That nothing can perfectly restore him but an entirely new mode of life, free from temptation and disquiet; by which the doctor explained that he meant a temporary separation from the peculiarities of my aunt and the habits of his present

society. In short, he said that, as soon as he can be moved, I must go away with him amongst friends of a different class. But other friends we have not. Go where we will, we must depend upon ourselves; and I feel that to risk him at his age, and with his infirmities, to the care of a mere girl like myself, who has never, but in the case which has made us——”

“*Friends*, Miss Longland, if I dare presume so far.”

“Friends, then,” she resumed, with a faint smile, “who has never, except in this instance, seen the world beyond a mile from this village, would be almost a slighting of Providence. What I would ask of you, with this long preface, and I ask it thus early because I understand from Mr. Philpot that you have fixed to leave Broome Warren tomorrow.”

“Certainly I shall not. It was my intention, but I have changed it. My departure will depend upon the progress of Mr. Bloomer, and the satisfactory termination of the arrangements which cause your present uneasiness.”

“I am very poor in thanks, but I give you all I can. I thought that with your, no doubt, large acquaintance, you might know some clergyman’s family who would not be too proud to take in two such unfriended refugees.”

“Do you then already withdraw the title you have just given me? What need have you for clergymen’s families or any other when your own house is so near at hand, with my aunt, instead of

your own, for chaperone, your young friend, so dear to you, for companion, and myself for anything you please? It has now, by the love of your good old nurse, and in spite of your faithless agent, been placed in perfect order, and will, in a very few days, be as fit to receive you as it was twenty years ago, and more likely to restore your uncle's faculties than any place in the world. Your mention of a clergyman reminds me that I have a friend who will undertake the duty here; and Mrs. Toogood shall come to-morrow with a more formal invitation. Reserve your answer for that, for I must not ask it to mine; and it is enough for the present that Mrs. Bloomer affords you no time to refuse it, for I hear her scolding somebody because I stay too long. Do not sadden yourself with a thought for the future, for you have now friends who will think for you."

The events of the last four and twenty hours had been too rapid and overpowering for poor Lucy's fortitude. She knew not what to say, and took leave of him in silence; but, when the door closed, there was an eloquence from her eyes which would have been dangerous to a nature much more indifferent than that of her chance acquaintance.

Being in no great mood for Mrs. Bloomer's promised company in his walk back to the Rosary, it was rather a blessing that from the stair on which she had been keeping watch for him, she had perceived a strange drake gallanting the Aylesburys in her duck-pond, and had rushed off for vengeance upon Tom Dabchick, the miscreant who drew a

salary of sixpence a week to throw stones at all such interlopers and maintain decorum. It was a good opportunity to show how politely he kept his engagement; so, seeing the parlour-door open, he left his card upon the table and made his escape.

CHAPTER XII.

FROM this time Crowley's visits to the vicar were constant, and every day evinced an improvement. The old man partially recovered his speech, and became dreamily sensible of his obligations to the strange gentleman who took so much interest in his recovery; and his natural disposition to friendly feelings towards everybody, established a partiality not to be wondered at. The visit was always protracted till he dropped asleep; but the opportunities which would thus have been afforded for further confidential conversation with Lucy, were made quite unavailable by the jealous vigilance of Mrs. Bloomer, who was not slow in perceiving that attentions were attracted much more up-stairs than down. This was by no means in accordance with her first opinion of Crowley's good taste; and the invitation to Oakendell which Mrs. Toogood had duly repeated to Lucy and her uncle, to her (Mrs. Bloomer's) exclusion, upon which the doctor was peremptory, increased the discontent into that uncomfortable state of mind to which persons of her

own description might have given the name of Dumps. Under these visitations she was particularly inaccessible to reason: and accordingly, as soon as the medical attendants were out of the house, she made it a rule to feel that no nursing could compare with the tender assiduities of a wife, and to insist on making one of the party. There was no danger of her talking too much, for she was too angry to be charming, and her anger had no tangible excuse, Crowley's presence being only in obedience to her own request. But there she would sit as long as he stayed: incensed still more by the numerous indications of misconduct on the part of Jim Crow and his wives who were forming plebeian connections all over the village.

Crowley, whom we will not attempt to absolve from an occasional wish to consign his wrathful admirer to regions more remote, took such pains as he could not help to be well-bred and reasonably agreeable; but the self-denial of passing hours in Lucy's company, without daring to speak to her, was too much to be borne, and he came to the resolution of seeking a friend to whom he could at least speak about her. The pretty girl—the favourite companion of whom she had talked with so much affection—offered just the resource he wanted; and, as she had accepted the invitation to his house, there was the greater pretext for making her an intimate acquaintance. Miss Lightfoot, better known as Miss Polly, and best as pretty Polly, had called to thank Mrs. Toogood for offering her so pleasant a visit, and afforded him a fair beginning—more to be desired

from his observation that prettiness and liveliness were far from being her only characteristics. He therefore took an early occasion to saunter past her dwelling and thrive by her good offices.

As he did not succeed till after two or three days' failure, and was deterred from calling by dis-taste to the looks of Miss Pinhorn, we will fill up the time by giving some more particular account of these young ladies.

Miss Penelope Pinhorn—whom we mention with deference because she considered it her due—and pretty Polly Lightfoot, with whom we drop cere-monily, because she usually dropped it herself, dwelt together in the trellised cottage we noticed some way back, where they were admitted to occupy the next position in that limited society to Mrs. Toogood. Miss Pinhorn thought herself entitled to the first, that young lady being the daughter of Sir Abraham Pinhorn, Knight, who had been the mayor of the county town.

Sir Abramam was of Hebrew extraction, and had passed his life in acts of benevolence towards Jew and Christian long previous to his title, as in all times subsequent to the creation of the world his tribe had done before him. So distinguished had they been that the afflicted in pocket had seldom been known to apply to any other resource, and grateful misery had absolutely claimed relationship with them, every member of whom, down to the Pinhorn in question, having been affectionately called "my uncle."

Virtue is its own reward, and sometimes finds



very surprising ones. Mr. Pinhorn became opulent, and, to remove the only obstacle to universal respect, got baptized. On the next vacancy he was elected mayor, and, soon after, being called upon to head a deputation on the occasion of some royal event, went down upon his knee as Mr. Pinhorn, and jumped up as Sir Abraham.

Long previous to this great occurrence he had espoused the daughter of one of his own tribe, who bore him Miss Penelope; and, long subsequently, he had supplied her vacancy with the pretty daughter of one of his numerous nephews, who was said to have consented thereto in liquidation of a debt. He was thus very prosperous and very happy, and desired nothing but long life to enjoy his blessings. This he desired from pure Christian diffidence, and because the doctrines of his new faith, as expounded by the church he frequented, had caused some doubts in his mind as to whether he might be one of the elect. Whether he ever solved them to his satisfaction we are unable to say, though we know he was convinced at last, by a mode of reasoning not to be disputed. Sir Abraham died, leaving his young widow with no family but her step-daughter, and, contrary to all estimation of his wealth, small consolation but the superintendence of his monument.

After this affliction Lady Pinhorn found herself the farther consolation of a second husband in the person of a very eligible Captain Lightfoot, except that he had nothing but his commission; but neither of her marriages was fortunate, for the first

husband had lived a good many years, and the second died very soon. By the latter, however, she felt herself best provided for, though not in the way of interest, for she now had a daughter on her own account, and years enough in store to make her all she desired—all but well off, for at her death, which occurred early, pretty Polly's gifts of fortune amounted to just enough for independence, but nothing more.

We have said nothing of Miss Pen all these years, because we thought we should have enough of her hereafter, but as some discrepancies of character may raise a question of what could have made Polly consent to their living together, we must account for it, first, by the disposition of Polly, which could have loved and accommodated itself to almost anybody in need of her, and next by that early time of life which, like the creeping flower of the forest, may be diverted from its chosen course by any less pliant branch that obtrudes in its way. Miss Pen, we are to remember, was a dozen years older, and neither by nature nor education had she shown any proclivity to those unselfish feelings so natural to her sex that we hardly recognise it without them. She could talk of tenderness and affection by the hour, but then it was always the tenderness and affection which she expected for herself; her own demonstrations never went further than jealous upbraiding that she got so little, or pathetic discontent when other people got any at all. Too oppressed by her graces to do anything for herself, and too much afflicted by refinement to

be satisfied by anything that was done for her; so delicate in health that no one could think of a comfort in her presence for fear of her more pressing need for it; for ever under a sense of oppression, when the oppressor was her own querulous temper, yet always haughty as the last remains of Sir Abraham—the titled old clothesman of the Pinhorns. With all these unhappy traits she could, of course, expect no friend to admit her pretensions or sympathise with her grievances, and nobody at all to conform to her requirements, except the kind sister, whom she delighted to call by that name because it seemed to take a few years from her own age, and to warrant frequent allusion to the remarkable fact of one being so very fair and the other a dark brunette. It would, therefore, be a desecration of all human ties if Polly should think of leaving her for any other asylum.

Matters having been thus arranged, Mr. Cheek—who had been long before appointed to the agency of Broome Warren, and had dealt largely at Sir Abraham's emporium of unredeemed pledges for the furniture of farm-houses, and his own—took his usual care to be ready with another accommodation. On the death of Lady Pinhorn he chanced to have a cottage vacant, and persuaded the young ladies to make it their future home; having a view, as was sometimes insinuated, of bettering his own condition by bettering his acquaintance with Miss Pen. No advance, however, had been made to this end, for the younger lady hated him, and the elder one,

he thought, would keep till he found there was no better chance of investing himself.

It is not very surprising that as one of this ill-assorted pair got older, and the other older still, their opposite qualities should become a little more developed, and that Polly should have her own opinions, and sometimes amuse herself by laughing at Miss Pen's. We make our first visit to them on a fine afternoon, when Crowley was taking his usual saunter past the window, and Polly was stationed thereat for something more entertaining than the tall, tawny complainer reclining in the background.

"Look, Pen," she exclaimed, "I declare there is Mr. Crowley! Oh, can't we call him in and ask how dear Lucy is to-day?"

"My dear Mary," replied Miss Pen in astonishment, "how can you think of such a thing! Do you forget that I am not acquainted with him, and never saw him except at church? And do you suppose that I can pass over the slight which he and Mrs. Toogood have put upon me by inviting you to Oakendell, to my marked exclusion?"

"Why, how could they invite you, Pen, when your dislike to poor Lucy, ever since she became my dearest friend, has been a thousand times more marked?"

"I think, Mary, it would have been more natural to consider your sister your dearest friend; and certainly more proper to decline an invitation from which she was excepted."

"I don't know what would have been most proper, but I know it would have been most un-

feeling to refuse what little aid I can give in cheering her under all these cruel troubles. But pray don't let us talk any more about it. Mr. Crowley has gone by, and here's somebody that will please you better. There's old Cheek passing the opposite way, and looking almost as black as he did when Mr. Crowley made him drive his pigs home."

"I don't think so at all. He has a great deal to think about, and I'm sure we have very much to thank him for."

"Yes, he's very obliging in providing us with everything we don't want, and taking his percentage."

"Mary, you really might spare such observations upon a friend who has been so attentive to us."

"To *you*, my dear. He knows better than to pay attentions to *me*. Has he not tempted poor old Mr. Bloomer to his filthy house every night to keep him in a chronic state of gin-and-water, and make him forget his tithes? Has he not—"

"Mary! such shocking calumnies!"

"Yet Lucy told me; and she never spread a calumny in her life."

"Miss Longland, I suppose, is an angel."

"And if an angel is not to be believed, didn't Mrs. Bloomer proclaim it from her window last Sunday? I'm sure *she* is no angel; and don't you think it rather undignified to encourage the discarded friends of whatever else she may be? Surely, dear Pen, with all your extreme delicacy you could never survive a proposal to become the lady of the quagmire at Green Lane's End."

"Mary, this is intolerable! You are enough to discompose a saint!"

"I daresay it is, Pen, for it discomposes me, and I'm only a sinner."

"This is your usual injustice, Mary; but I never meet with anything else—except ingratitude. Mr. Cheek would never presume to aspire to the daughter of Sir Abraham Pinhorn; and, if he did, sisters should always be the first consideration to each other. *My* idea is that they should have but one thought, one feeling, one object in life, one wish never to be separated for a moment, and I cannot conceal from myself that you are never happy out of the society of Miss Lucy Longland, as if your own home were irksome and disagreeable."

"Have but one object, Pen? Then, of course, you have made up your mind never to marry; and so it is of no consequence whether old Kit saw me laugh at him or not. But if he has no intention of presuming, I think you must admit that Neddy Fozzard has; and Kit, bad as he is, is worth a dozen of him. Suppose I tell them both to keep their distance, because you are determined never to leave sister Polly?"

"I will not hear you disparage Mr. Fozzard, Mary, because you do not understand him!"

"I understand him as well as any one else does, and know as much about him. Where does the creature come from? Who is he? What is he? He says he is come for the seclusion and meditation indispensable for the completion of some great work! What a treat we shall have when his lucubrations

come forth ! Ha, ha, ha ! The creature will be the death of me !"

Miss Pen's fine eyes were elevated and rolling in contemptuous displeasure, and they rolled a little more from the conviction that she had no very ready answer, for Polly's position was too strong for her. Her wits, indeed, were no match for Polly's, which had been somewhat sharpened by the necessity for them since the advent of the gentleman in dispute, and perhaps a trifle more so by having lost the chance of hearing news of Lucy, to whom, we have before said, she had no access ; but they were never more than the pat of a kitten.

" Well, well," she resumed, " don't be angry, for here he comes to bless our evening walk, and I promise to be very charming. Where is our pretty page ? Here, Sprat ! Run and let in Mr. Edward Fozzard, and then saddle Edward the donkey. By the bye, I wish you had not given them the same name, for Sprat can never tell which is which—and I wish Mr. Fozzard would not always enquire for Miss Penny Lope, for fear they should, some day, give him a penny loaf."

" Ha, ha ! " cried a prelude of bagpipes from a large flaky head, playing at bo-peep. " I hear you ! I almost caught the joke ! Pray let us have it again, for I long for something to laugh at !"

" Dear me," replied Polly, " I should have thought Mr. Fozzard could never want a subject as long as he lived ! Shall I say it again, Pen ? It will be such fun."

" Mary, you are always thinking of fun, which is

exceedingly unbecoming in young ladies! Where did you ever hear of such a thing as fun, as you call it, in the society to which we have been accustomed?"

"Nowhere, I grant. Perhaps though, if we heard a little more, it might heighten the effect of our elegance. What do you say, Mr. Fozzard?"

"Cha-a-arming!" buzzed the blue-bottle, "what a flow of spirits! What would I not give that my avocations did not weigh down my own! But see, my dear Miss Penny Lope, here's your Midas at the door."

"Oh, Mr. Fozzard, remember that is not the name you gave him! Not that anything deserves to be called after you; but you know his name is Edward."

"De-lightful! I am overwhelmed! I regard him as a brother," and the guttural melody made another gargle.

The ladies were already prepared for their excursion. Polly in a light cottage hat and jaunty jacket, as airy as herself, and Pen in an opera hat and ostrich feathers. A chair being placed by the side of her palfrey, she tenderly seated herself and opened an exquisite parasol; and Polly, having arranged the clouds of drapery, tripped along on one side, as chaperon, while Mr. Fozzard marched on the other as dangerous man, whilst Sprat and his cockade, with a kid leather whip, did the honour of Neddy's rear.

And so the procession advanced through the green glades and golden broom to the dead march of Mr.

Fozzard's bagpipe, which struck up before starting, with small likelihood of exhaustion before he returned.

It was not till the beauties of the sunset had blushed themselves beyond his patronage that the party found themselves a mile or two from home, and Miss Pen was beginning to meditate a return. But events of the greatest consequence will occur when we least look for them. She had no sooner essayed to prevail on Edward to point his ears homeward when he recognized a friend or sweetheart of his own species browsing in a bush by the way-side, and decidedly objected. He, moreover, set up a terrific shout of jubilation, which Polly afterwards declared she had mistaken for a sudden burst of laughter from his godfather. It rose and fell in rumbling roars and screams, till a check of the bridle turned the advance into a rear-up, and then Edward walked upon his hind legs and pawed the air—as unmanageable a jackass as ever defied a costermonger. Miss Pen shrieked and would have fainted, if such a measure had not involved an indecorous tumble over his tail; Polly shrieked too, but we are afraid it was not a shriek of alarm; and Sprat applied his whip with the vigour of a giant; but Neddy was determined to have a word with his friend, and became more and more uproarious. Mr. Fozzard, who had at first wheeled about in a panic, had presently recourse to his great reasoning powers. If he approached in front, his godson might box his ears with his hoofs, but if he rushed in from the rear it was possible that Edward, being on his

hind legs, would not kick. To the rear therefore he rushed, and, seizing Miss Pen round her elegant waist (we are obliged to admit it), dragged her from her perilous position ; and, dropping distractedly on one knee, supported her disordered graces on the other. Sprat—irreverent little varlet that he was—thought the scene so wonderfully like the end of a tournament, which he had lately witnessed at the beer-shop, that he took no notice of the farther proceedings of Neddy or Polly either. Polly was the only one in possession of her senses, and so, snatching the whip from his hands and seizing the reins, she not only whirled the rebel round about, but (amazing instance of rashness !) sprang upon his back, and made such an improvement upon Sprat's admonitions as persuaded him at once into common sense and uncommon speed. Miss Pen, feeling herself very comfortable, dropped her head upon Mr. Fozzard's shoulder and fainted. Whereupon, Sprat, fearing she would never "come to time," turned round to consult Polly and the donkey ; and, finding they had both run away, ran away himself to fetch the doctor.

Was it a runaway ? Well, Sprat said so ; but, no doubt, Miss Polly had been suffering long enough under the weight of Mr. Fozzard's genius to be rather tired, and anxious to get home. Besides, nobody had attended to her, or said a word to her, and if she had occasionally dropped back a hundred yards or so—chaperon as she was—nobody seemed to miss her. Indeed, she had rather believed they would be glad to get rid of her, if it were not for the

proprieties, on which subject she entertained opinions of her own. Edward's interesting rencontre had given her fair occasion to assert them, and the reader can take which view he pleases. For ourselves, we confess we can hardly make up our minds. If Neddy was really running away, we cannot think the cracking of the whip was the most likely mode of stopping him; and, again, if Polly was borne off against her will, it is not usual for young ladies in such predicaments to express their terror in fits of laughter. All we can say is that she arrived safely in the village, where she almost galloped over Mr. Crowley.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE manner of their meeting was too amusing to be ceremonious ; and, as she jumped off and flung the rein over the garden railing, they shook hands with a mutual disposition to laugh.

"I am afraid, Miss Lightfoot, that high-spirited animal has run away with you ?"

Polly could not tell which had run away with the other. She had not tried to stop him, and their motives for getting home were about equal. "The truth is, Mr. Crowley, I saw you pass our window some time ago without being able to beg a few words about dear Lucy, and as I left our party pretty well engaged I thought I might steal away and intercept you on your way home. I have learnt some matters which she cannot know too soon, and have no means of conveying them unless you will help me."

There was something earnest in her look which startled him. Perhaps the man of the platform was at his post again, for he was seldom absent.

"As I have a good deal to say," she resumed, "and should not like to be interrupted, I had better

not ask you in. We can take advantage of our garden door into the forest, where I can put you on a short way home."

They said little more till they had emerged amongst the green twilit pathways, and she had looked around to be sure they were hidden from view. She then, without losing time in further preface, began her communication.

"Last Sunday night," she said, "when there was little hope that Mr. Bloomer would survive till the morning, my extreme anxiety led me out upon the green in front of the Vicarage, in the hope of seeing some indication at the windows of what was passing within, or of finding some one who could give me information. There was no one to be met with—not a soul in the village stirring. It was cloudy and very dark, and, as I could see nothing, I approached nearer to listen. To my surprise, I almost put my hand upon another person engaged in the same watch. This turned out to be a girl of the village, who had been for some time engaged as servant to Mr. Cheek. She was one of the many who had often been rescued by Lucy's hand from the want and starvation so common in this wretched place, and was seeking hopelessly for an opportunity of seeing her, to disclose some proceedings of Cheek's, which appeared to concern her deeply. Knowing us to be inseparable friends, and thinking I might see her the soonest, she disclosed them to me."

Polly then gave a minute account of all that had transpired at Cheek's house on the Saturday night,

as far as her informant had been able to observe. Of Aaron's arrival, and the consternation it created; of the Vicar's visit, and his conveyance home, with Nelly's unexpected attendance; and the singular conversation between Aaron and Lucy, who seemed to be known to each other, though their words were not distinguishable except at the conclusion, when Aaron asserted that some person was a great villain.

"Who was he?" asked Crowley.

"She did not hear."

"Where is Aaron?"

"Gone, no one knows where. He went away on Sunday morning, supplied with clothes and money by Cheek, who has ever since been in great apprehension of something which is equally in mystery. My fears are that, as her father's agent, Cheek may have involved her in some sort of peril, from which she requires immediate advice to extricate herself. But this is by no means the most important part of my story. Some clue to its meaning may possibly be found in what I have still to say, though I have not been able to connect it. Last night I walked towards the Vicarage again, and again met the girl I spoke of. She had now another strange tale. In the course of the day a gentleman, who said he had come down from London in consequence of having seen the Vicar's sudden illness in the county paper, called upon Cheek as the agent of the property, to ascertain the particulars. Nelly had learnt thus much at the desire of her master, who never chooses to see people till he has heard their business, and described him as about three or four and thirty

years old, dressed something like the fashionable horse-dealers who come down to this part of the country to make purchases at the annual fairs—very talkative, and remarkably free in his manner."

"Did Cheek admit him?"

"He would not be denied. Her master did not know him, but scrutinized him with his fixed look of suspicion that nobody can visit him with good intentions. 'You don't seem to recollect me, Mr. Cheek,' he began, 'but we shall be friends presently, if you'll only let that girl raise the window, and leave the door open, for I've a particular objection to the smell of gin.' Mr. Cheek, finding himself treated with so little ceremony, seemed to think it might be an occasion for adopting rather more himself, and the stranger was indulged.

"The door being left unclosed, and Nelly, thinking herself bound by what she had heard in the Vicarage garden, to hear anything more that might concern Lucy, the kitchen door was unclosed likewise."

As Nelly's relation, with the account of what Polly afterwards witnessed for herself, was long and minutely graphic, we must endeavour to condense them in our own language.

"Well, Mr. Cheek," resumed the visitor, "and so you don't know me? My name is Captain Cox."

Nelly heard a motion of Cheek's chair, as if he started.

"Quite enough," he replied. "Quite enough, Captain Cox. There's no necessity to say more; I recollect all about you."

"I shouldn't wonder. It is a long time ago, but

you are not likely to forget Uncle Downton, for he served Sir Harry rather a bad turn, though luck served me a pretty good one, by giving him no time to make a will."

"Yes, yes, I know all about it. You became heir-at-law and a rich man. There was a great deal of affliction amongst us in those days, and I make it a rule never to talk about them."

"You are quite right, Cheek, for those we don't want back again are best forgotten. Well, I had something to do hereabouts, and hastened my journey to hear whether old Bloomer is dead."

Cheek was again surprised. What could Captain Cox know about Mr. Bloomer?

"Why, no," he replied, "the old man is not dead, and is likely, from what I hear, to last some time longer. But I was not aware that you knew him."

"Ah, very likely. I was not aware of it myself, for I have not had much to do with folks of that calling since I was baptized; but in this instance I really feel a concern, for I am told his life is of great consequence to Sir Harry's daughter."

Cheek compressed his little black eyes with another look of scrutiny.

"I was equally unaware," he answered, "that you were acquainted with Miss Longland."

"Indeed! What, she never told you?"

Crowley was electrified.

"Never told him!"

"How could she," replied Polly, "when the information would have been false? Is it likely that

Lucy should have an acquaintance of this description?"

"Very unlikely—very—but—" and his thoughts rushed back to the platform.

"If Lucy had known such a creature, do you suppose I should have been in ignorance of it?"

"But if the assertion was false, how certain the detection."

"Not perhaps under present circumstances, till some pressing purpose is answered; and what that may be is our object to discover." Captain Cox then talked about his great pleasure in introducing himself to Mr. Cheek, of whom he had formerly heard a great deal from his late uncle, and had a way of fixing his eye, which seemed to be as little agreeable as the conversation from which Cheek had excused himself. He was so pertinacious in this, under the appearance of carelessness, that one would have thought he did it on purpose, till Cheek became impatient, and recalled him rather shortly to business.

"I see, Captain Cox, you are sounding the channel to something else which you have not mentioned. But there's no need to lose time. It is all very well for folks of fashion to study modes of approach, but men in my line don't need them. We can't afford to be delicate. The jockey on your breast-pin will tell you that one man will win the race whilst another is gathering up his reins."

"Very true, Cheek; you are just what I was told I should find you, as sharp as a terrier, and as rough as a badger. We are both men of the world. You

know well enough that though you are, no doubt, an excellent fellow, I should have been very unlikely to bother my head about your acquaintance if I did not want to make use of it, and *I* know, quite as well, that you would not bother yours about salvation, if we made it worth your while to jog the other road. Now, you see, we understand one another, so here's the proposal I have come all this way to make."

Cheek here found the conversation was getting too interesting to be carried on with open doors, and rose up to close them. Nelly heard no more for the next half hour, when Captain Cox was going away. She then saw they had established a great friendship, and heard her master receive an invitation to dine at the Longland Arms this day. "And there they are," said Polly, concluding her narrative, "in 'e'll probability plotting mischief at this moment."

So strange a story was naturally followed by much conversation, which made the time pass unobserved, and it was now dark. They had strolled along the road till they found themselves at the turning of the private one to Mrs. Toogood's lodge. They here thought they must go no farther, and seated themselves amongst the broome upon the bank; but before they had time for much consultation, the moon suddenly broke out, and, in the same instant they heard voices, and the step of a horse.

The men were leisurely approaching, and were presently in sight, one of them leading the horse. They were talking earnestly, but the horseman spoke in a heedless manner, as if the subject were

unimportant, or his caution something the worse for their cheer at the public house. It was soon beyond a doubt that they were the persons who had so closely occupied them.

“Do moderate your voice,” said Cheek, “there’s no knowing what this long broome may hold. It is just the time when all the village is out sweet-heating or poaching, or both together; and nobody has such ready ears as those who are afraid of being caught.”

“What, you know that from experience, do you, Cheek? Well, there’s no disputing such good authority; and as we’ve got to the place where the road branches off I must mount and make play for the train.”

“Plenty of time,” replied Cheek, “we must stop a bit before we part, because we have not done yet about this sum that should be paid down.”

“What signifies? I don’t carry thousands in my pocket, and cannot write cheques without pen and ink. You have my word, and ain’t that as good as my bond?”

Cheek made no answer, which seemed to imply a doubt, and after a moment observed,

“This is a hazardous affair. If we succeed, well and good. But if we don’t? You say you saw her in London?”

“I might have seen her a hundred times; but she was afraid of that aunt, and there was no dodging her.”

Crowley was springing to his feet; but Polly caught him by the arm.

The negotiators heard nothing, and proceeded; Cox averring that there was no difficulty at all on the part of Lucy, "for when I heard her aunt was coming up to town——"

"Who told you that?" demanded Cheek.

"Oh! I've friends hereabouts; when I heard that I wrote to her, and up she came; quite pretty enough to convince me that since I happen to possess her father's fortune I couldn't do a pleasanter thing than invite her to share it."

"Um! that was your motive for writing, was it?"

Cheek was evidently suspicious of some other, but did not think fit to reject the one given.

"And how," he inquired, "did the project answer?"

"How? Why, it would have answered well enough; only there was no time. She knows what she's about, and so you'd have said if you had seen her cut me when I went to see her off by the train. She had no fancy for betraying our acquaintance to her aunt, and that's not a bad sign."

Little pride would Lucy have felt in the thrill which these communications shot through the heart she had so suddenly enthralled. The facts recalled by a part of them seemed to vouch undeniably for all that was insinuated; but Crowley still compelled himself to listen whilst it was possible to have more proof.

Cheek continued to make further demurs about his risk, but the Captain, though the fumes of the Longland Arms were not quite dispersed, was sober enough to argue his case.

"Why, now, Cheek," he expostulated, "I cannot, for the life of me, see what risk you run. You have been Sir Harry's man of confidence, and have known her from childhood. As a matter of course, your influence must be considerable. Use it for my advantage, and there's your price. Remember this is for the girl as she stands—no advantages, no engagements, as we say—no stake that she is pretty sure of winning. If the estate had been entailed that's another matter; or if there had been any other property in prospect. But you say there is none?"

The question was asked rather significantly, and answered somewhat in the same tone.

"None; you never heard of any, did you? But who told you the estate was not entailed, and gave you so many particulars which I thought were only known to myself?"

Cox made no reply; perhaps because the village clock at that moment struck ten, and reminded him of his train. He turned to tighten his horse's girths, and only muttered a few maledictions at its wincing, with his head under the saddle flap. Meanwhile the light fell upon Cheek's face so as to show the entire expression, in the complicated characters of which his ally might have read anything but the assurance of amity or good faith. He might also have seen a slight indication of disquietude in the assumed carelessness of the repeated inquiry as to what could have made him think of other property.

"Surely it is known well enough that she never can have any."

“Property?—Stand, you fidgety brute!” ejaculated the Captain, dividing his attention with the girth strap between his teeth. “Oh! I don’t know. In old families, like this of the Longlands, there’s often property turning up of some sort or other, the rummaging of old chests and odd corners; and Sir Harry, I have heard, was a careless sort of fellow who would rather lose things than take the trouble to put them away. That’s all,” and, having completed his horse’s toilet, he turned round upon a countenance which was immediately the picture of sincerity.

“Well, Cheek, and so there’s no more chance, eh? never mind. I was only thinking that if there were no prospects your friendship for the family would have made you more ready to assist her to a rich marriage, even without a retaining fee. Only that—but I’ve no time to say more; for here’s not half an hour to do four miles over roads that are rough enough for a steeple chase. Write to me as soon as you have anything to say.”

“Yes; but you have not told me where.”

Crowley listened eagerly.

“I forgot that; and I cannot exactly say. This is a busy time, and I’ve a round of races to attend. But as soon as I know where I am, I’ll let you know, and so good-night.”

With these words, he vaulted into the saddle and disappeared at a sharp canter. Cheek watched him, with a return of that lowering sneer till he was out of sight, and then slowly melted in the misty moonlight.

Crowley and Polly turned to each other to compare notes of astonishment.

He was unable to express a thought, so utterly was he confounded by the confirmation of all his suspicions, and Polly was beginning to doubt whether she had done quite the service she intended.

"Do not," she insisted. "Do not judge dear Lucy so hastily. When you know her as I do you will stake your life she can do nothing inconsiderate. She stands more in need of aid than exposed to blame. We know not all the trials she is under. No one knows but herself and this atrocious Cheek, whose long and determined silence about her father would make the letter from Captain Cox irresistible. Remember, we heard him say he was nephew and heir to all the robberies of Downton, and whom would she think so likely to relieve her from her years of suffering?"

The word of reason was spoken in good time, for it came when Crowley's stock was quite exhausted; but he made a strong effort to regain it.

"I think," he replied, "that these scoundrels have each some end disguised from the other, and that, with the aid of that man whom you before mentioned, and with some explanation from Miss Longland, strange things may be brought to light, and both of them to good account. One is not likely to commit himself to the extortions of his fellow rogue without stronger motives than he gives, and the other is as little likely to have been confused at the

allusion to family papers if none had existed. It remains to be seen whether she *will* explain. She has said nothing of these matters to *you*."

The fact was not to be denied or accounted for; and a long and painful conversation ensued, but ended in no present plan of proceeding, except to keep their confidence a secret, and, in Lucy's present state of trial, as much from her as from others. She would very soon be safe at Oakendell, where perhaps she might be more communicative and help them to deliberate with more composure.

It was then time to separate, which they did, as Miss Pen might have said, like two guilty creatures who had set at naught the whole world of proprieties.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUT what had become of Miss Pen and her own proprieties all this time? We are concerned to remember that we left her in a questionable fainting-fit on Mr. Fozzard's knee, and that Sprat, unmindful of decorum, had deserted them in search of the doctor. Having had much practice in running, incidental to his foragings amongst the apple-orchards, he was in excellent wind, and reached the village almost as soon as Polly at full speed. On the way he met sundry other boys, who had gone through the same system of training and could run like hares, and shouted the flying intelligence that it was "all up with missis!" Then he alarmed all the villagers who chanced to be gossiping at their cottage-doors, and finally he found Doctor Choke, who could follow the scent of a good case with the speed of a fox-hound. After that, Mr. Sprat thought it was time to indulge himself with a ride, so catching Neddy from the railing to which Polly had attached him, he jumped upon his tail, and galloped off to command the regiment he had raised.

Miss Pen's fainting-fit had been alarmingly pro-

tracted ; and, when she came to herself, it had not occurred to her to change her position, but what the conversation had been, must remain a mystery ; for, as the reader knows, our attention was engaged elsewhere. All we can repeat was a tremulous exclamation of "Oh, Edward ! Edward !"

We are convinced these exclamations must have been intended for the other Edward, and not for Mr. Fozzard ; but we cannot pretend to say how they were interpreted by the light company of Sprat's Own, who, unperceived in the twilight, and favoured by the overpowering feelings of the principal personages, were standing at ease within four or five yards of them. Certain it is that when Mr. Fozzard's eyes, in their fine frenzy rolling, happened to roll upon this light company, they seemed to roll out of his head, and Mr. Fozzard himself to shoot up from a powder-mill ; whilst Miss Pen, propelled by the same convulsion, made an aërial excursion, from which she lighted on the ground, like Iris on a special message from Olympus.

The situation was peculiar and rather perplexing. We cannot ask any of our fair readers what they would have done, because it is out of the question to conceive them in such a one ; and we are equally at a loss to know what we should have done ourselves, because we never happened to be so surprised. Upon the whole, we are inclined to believe that Miss Pen and her philosopher adopted a line of tactics as good as any other. Dropping the dignity with which she had been used to look down upon such little, disorderly fragments of humanity which

remained after the manufacture of persons like herself, she smiled with delightful indulgence :

“ Ah, Jerry Hodges, my good boy, is that you ?”
“ E'es.”

“ And I declare there's Jacky Rokins and Tommy Dabchick ! I'm so glad you have been good and have got a holiday !”

“ We ain't got one.”

“ Oh, never mind ; I won't tell ! I never tell tales, and I hope nobody does, for it is very bad to tell tales. There's something for you all to go and buy marbles. But don't say who gave it to you, or good Mr. Cheek will think I spoil you.”

“ Noa, we wunt ; 'cause he'd be like enough to take it away from us.”

“ Oh, dear ! That would be a pity ! So take care, my dears, you don't say you have seen me !”

“ Noa ; nor he, neither. Come along, Jerry ! Come you Tom Dabchick ! Whoop ! Give us a back ! Whoohoo !” And away they went, with a series of vaults over each other's heads, to tell the whole parish.

Mr. Fozzard's comportment was different. His philosophy never having been exercised on such a case as his own very unforeseen one, he walked in upright solemnity, considering what was the most proper thing to be done, and whether the “ Penny Magazine ” had ever treated of the article ‘ Boy,’ and how he could be made to hold his tongue. Perhaps the best way might be to give him sixpence ; but, as Miss Penny Lope had forestalled him, it was of no use to give it over again ; and so he gazed on the rising stars and was deep in astronomy.

As they moved on they met other detachments of Sprat's Own ; then the regimental surgeon and his volunteer assistants ; then our own special reporters ; and finally the commanding-officer on his blown charger, who, finding that his utmost speed caused no relaxation of whacks and kicks, very naturally decided upon trying what reward he should get for standing still.

It was a lengthy gauntlet to run, but Miss Pen went through it with exquisite feeling, having a charming recognition for every one, and holding up her train with the points of her thumb and finger so gracefully, that one might have thought her broad, romantic hat to have been crushed into a butter-boat on purpose. The apprehensions that had brought out so many kind friends, and their congratulations on her narrow escape, were so gratifying, that she expressed herself very glad the accident had occurred. Of course Mr. Fozzard's admirable presence of mind and undaunted intrepidity came in for its high tribute of applause, so that he too was congratulated, and he too expressed his pleasure at such flattering attentions. The public, however, seemed rather disappointed that the event had not been of greater consequence, for events at Broome Warren were of rare occurrence. Nevertheless, as there was no occasion for tears, they made themselves what amends they could with demonstrations more lively ; and even Dr. Choke, the most aggrieved of all, smiled as well as could be expected. At last Miss Pen was restored to the back of rebellious

Edward, and re-entered the village under the escort of all its inhabitants.

Poor Polly, when alone with Pen, was destined to find the suavity bestowed on Jerry Hodges and the rest, by no means extended to her.

"Mary, you have ruined me! made me the scandal of the whole village, and driven me to a step which you know I never contemplated, but which is now indispensable!"

"Dear Pen, I'm very sorry to hear it."

"You know I never had a thought of Mr. Fozzard. You know my intense feeling that sisters should never be separated. You deserted me under the most cruel and trying circumstances! Left me insensible on a gentleman's knee in the midst of a drove of dirty boys, and ruined my reputation! Have I not, all my life, been teaching you what is due to our dignity? And have I deserved to be undone for all my pains, for all my affection, for all my determination to live a single life that you might never want protection, solace, companionship, and all the delights which sisters were born to afford each other?"

And here Miss Pen burst into a passion of tears, which had well-nigh set the astonished Polly off into a peal of laughter.

"My dearest Pen! how could I know that your dignity would oblige you to sit upon Neddy Fozzard's knee? How could I divine that Edward the First would place you in such a position, or that Edward the Second would set his godfather such a bad example? And how could I tell whether you would

not reproach me for impropriety if I stayed to witness such confidential proceedings ? If I was wrong, in going away, how was I to conceive you would think it right to let Sprat go away too ? After all, I can't see what great harm has been done. You met with a fright, and people will say so, and there's an end of it. If you don't like Mr. Fozzard, and feel a delicacy in telling him so, only tell it to *me*, who happen to be born with so little of that delicacy, and joy betide him !"

" Mary, you know him to be immeasurably above all other men !"

" Well, then, no harm has been done. You couldn't hope to marry a better man than the best ; and, as for me, you may be sure I shall never complain of your breaking through your maxim about sisters ; for I think they ought to consider each other's happiness quite irrespectively of all selfish considerations. Therefore it appears to me that all you find fault with has been very fortunate, since it has brought matters to a crisis."

" I never heard a speech so unnatural ! It is plain you want to get rid of me ! But remember, Mary, if I am unhappy—if my heart is broken—it is all your doing ! The wisest people have laid it down that marriage is a lottery."

" Yes, but you have drawn a great prize, you know ; and surely you ought not to be angry with me for giving the wheel such a lucky turn. I think you ought to be very much pleased with me, and with Sprat, too—especially Sprat—for he it is that has removed the last obstacle to the *éclaircissement*,

and brought the folks to congratulate you. I shouldn't wonder if he were just now gone to set the bells ringing."

"Ah, the little wretch!" Miss Pen sprang up from her seat as suddenly as she had bounced from Edward's knee, and pulled down the bell-rope. Sprat bolted in as if the tug had been at his ear.

"Sprat, you imp! How dare you see my face?"

"Please, mum, I come a-cause the bell rung."

"What made you run away from me to-night, sir? Tell me that!"

"Please, mum, I thought as how you was a-dying."

"And what made you come back again? What made you come back, I say?"

"Please, mum, I come with Doctor Choke."

Sprat betrayed his intelligence by a slight wink; and as Miss Pen saw that he understood her, she became more exasperated than before.

"What are you making faces at, sir? How dare you, sir! Go along, sir, and see if all those people are still at the door!"

"Yes, mum; they're all there, and ever so many more, a-hearing of you blowing me up!" And off went Sprat in loud affliction to make them hear the better. "It wasn't no fault of mine, mum. I never knows what to do, a-cause when I does my best it allays turns out for the wurst. Whoo, hoo! You never told me as you was a-going to be busy, and didn't want me. Whoo, hoo, hoo!"

There was something so amusing in Pen's betrayal

of her real cause of wrath that Polly could not refrain from laughing almost as loud as Sprat lamented, but she exerted herself to keep the peace.

“Never mind, Pen, never mind! If proposals were interrupted, there will be plenty more opportunities. Only give Neddy an additional feed of corn, and he’ll kick you off again to-morrow; but there’s no need to explain the case to all the people at the window.”

“Didn’t I tell you to go and send them away, you detestable brat? Do you not hear me? What are you staring at? Why don’t you go?”

“Please, mum, if they wants to know how you find yourself, what am I to say?”

“Stupid boy! Tell them to go about their business. Lock the door and go along to bed, and don’t let me hear another word.”

“No, mum; good night, mum.” And so he composed a message, that “Missis was no how at all;” and went to bed expressing his deep concern by whistling, “Hey for Bob and Joan.”

“Hear him, Mary! Hear him! There’s the sort respect you bring down upon me! If I don’t go out of my senses I shall doubt if I ever had any!” With which Pen seized a candle and flounced out of the room.

“Poor Pen!” said Polly to herself, “I fear other people may doubt that too.” And she took another candle to follow her; but just as she laid her hand upon the door, with the front window close at her side, she was arrested by a very low tap; and, looking hastily round, perceived a pair of eyes

looking in ; for the troubles of Mr. Sprat had caused him to forget the shutters. Looking closer, she distinguished a female face, and presently she made out the good-looking features of Nelly. Being assured that something of importance had brought her, she placed her finger on her lips to enjoin silence ; and, stepping on tip-toe to the front door, very cautiously unlocked it, and let her in.

“ Nelly,” she said, “ speak low ; we must not be heard up stairs. You have brought me more news.”

“ You told me last night, ma’am, that you were going to Oakendell, and I did not know whether I might have another chance of seeing you ; so as Mr. Cheek is safe, I thought I would just try to tell you something—I don’t know whether you will think much of it ; but as people are talking about Mr. Fozzard coming here so often, you may perhaps like to hear it.”

“ Certainly, Nelly ; anything about Mr. Fozzard, and the worse the better !”

“ Well, ma’am, Mr. Cheek was a little uneasy before he went to bed to know who told Captain Cox so much about Miss Longland and the family property, and asked me, as if his head was full of it, whether I had ever seen that fellow Cox in the village before. I told him I had, once or twice, and he then looked more put out, and was very anxious to know where he had been.”

“ Did you know ?”

“ No, ma’am ; and he desired me to be quick and find out. I told him he had better find out for himself, for I had no mind to be asking about such

gentlemen, and he seemed to have no mind himself. We had an altercation about it, as we have about a good many things, and I could see he was afraid to be heard making enquiries. He wanted me to pick up the information as if I was not looking for it, and made it of no consequence. But it was plain that he did—and great consequence."

"You mentioned Mr. Fozzard. Had he any suspicion of *him*?"

"No, ma'am; but *I* had. He spoke of him amongst a good many others who might know something, and then he doubted, and said Mr. Fozzard wouldn't do, for he was a stranger to the place, and Cox's friend must be some old inhabitant."

"And what made you think differently?"

"Because I know that Mr. Fozzard has been making acquaintance all round about, ever since he has been here, which Mr. Cheek might have heard for himself, if anybody had cared to tell him. He is great friends with all the tenants, and asks all sorts of questions about Mr. Cheek and his treatment of them, and everybody thinks he must have some particular reason."

"Then he is doing it for some underhand purpose, for he has kept it a profound secret from us! But what makes you suppose he is employed for Captain Cox?"

"I suspected it from what I heard in the parlour yesterday; but, as he is so great a friend here, I did not say so. I thought I had better make sure before I told you; and sure enough I am now—I am acquainted with the girl who waits upon the company."

at the Longland Arms, and am just come from her to let you know what I have heard, and ask what I shall do."

"Go on, my good Nelly; this may be of immense consequence! What did she say?"

"She said, ma'am, that the first thing Captain Cox did, when he arrived yesterday morning, was to send for Mr. Fozzard, who came immediately, and stayed with him for more than two hours; and it was certainly on particular business; because, when they rang for something, the table was covered with papers. She saw Captain Cox roll them up carefully and put them in his pocket, and heard him say it was all very satisfactory, and that he had now made up his mind. They then parted, and he asked her the way to Mr. Cheek's.

Polly's surprise was great, and her eyes sparkled with some bright anticipation.

"Nelly, my dear Nelly, have you time to run up to the Rosary and tell this to Mr. Crowley; for he is going away to-morrow morning?"

"It would not be safe, ma'am. Mr. Cheek knows I am out on his errand, and is very likely to get up and be looking for me."

"Then we must decide for ourselves. What would Cheek do if he knew that Fozzard was Cox's spy?"

"Make him remember it! He never forgives, and I don't believe he'd stick at anything."

"So much the better. And what would become of Cox?"

"Whatever he's about would be blown to the

sky. For, if Mr. Fozzard wouldn't tell, the farmers must, or else be turned out."

"And Miss Longland and Miss Pinhorn would be rescued from all three of them at once. We cannot leave the work in better hands than Cheek's: let him have the benefit of the fact, and Neddy Fozzard the consequences. We cannot be wrong. Run home and tell him every word. Make the story as bad as you can. If he is frightened, frighten him worse; and be sure you shall never want friends. Come to me before I leave, which will not be for three or four days; and, in the meantime——"

The speech was cut short by a whistle and a scream! Mr. Sprat had been too much excited to sleep very soundly, and was again practising "Bob and Joan," which again drew down Miss Pen's enthusiastic applause. Nelly was out of the house in a moment, and Polly fastened the door and shut the shutters, and stole away to her room.

CHAPTER XV.

IT will not be supposed that Crowley, on his return to the Rosary, made any disclosure of the particulars he had obtained from Polly Lightfoot, as that would have been a general publication of them. He knew besides that, however desirable it was for his aunt to dispense with the respectful co-operations of Mr. Cheek, and however agreeable it might be to himself to make the communication, her patronage, wherever bestowed, was unassailable. He had never spoken of it, though he had seen its expediency from the first day, for he had not much doubt that he could very soon place her favoured man of business in a position to settle his own. Their tea-table discussion was therefore directed to the great necessity for moving Mr. Bloomer with the least delay possible, in which Mrs. Toogood perfectly agreed, as her visit to the vicarage, when she gave the invitation to Oakendell, was received by Mrs. Bloomer in a manner by no means recom-mendatory of her fitness for the charge of an invalid. She was quite ready to fulfil her engagement the

moment the house was ready, and undertook to prepare Lucy and Polly, and account for her nephew's departure from Broome Warren rather sooner than he expected.

There was another cause for her readiness to commit him to his own protection, and this was in reference to Mr. Thomas Philpot, who had been long ago forbidden the vicarage for the sin of carrying Lucy's comforts to the poor, and declining to convey the scoldings of Mrs. Bloomer. The removal to Oakendell would restore that excellent young man to the occupation in which he took so much delight; and, at the same time, enable Lucy to bestow upon him the reward which dear James's liberality had placed in her power.

"Don't you agree with me, dear James?"

"Entirely, my dear aunt. I have been very remiss in not having yet called upon Mr. Philpot, and shall make a point of taking him in my way to-morrow."

When the next day arrived, and breakfast and good advice were disposed of, he took his leave, and set out to perform his promise.

The name of Tom Philpot's mansion was Huntsmore Lodge, which had probably been more suited to it in days gone by than it was at the period of which we are writing. Tom had long been doing his best to drop it, but nothing sticks so tenaciously as a name, whether too good or too bad, and Huntsmore Lodge it will be as long as a brick stands. His forefathers, for a good many generations, had been what is called "well-to-do" in the world. They

had possessed a good quantity of land, but had occupied a rather anomalous position in it, never having reached that of the old county families, except upon sufferance, though by no means descending to the subordinate one of ordinary farmers. They were highly respectable, hospitable and jovial, and always popular, in virtue of a capital pack of harriers, which gave them a hand and glove acquaintance with most of the squires—in the *field*, but not at their *tables*. As we have said, it never led to equality; partly, perhaps, because the Adam and Eve of the family had risen from lower beginnings, and partly because they were contented with their lot, and had no ambition to be the objects of condescension.

Unfortunately, this sort of contentment is not apt to encourage very aspiring views of education, and is especially hard upon the females of such a race. The Miss Philpots had, time out of mind, been considered the prettiest and the best girls in that part of the country, but both they and their parents were aware that a rattle on the harpsicord, and a little French acquired at a country boarding-school, were not enough to command high connections, and none had ever occurred to take them out of their unassuming course.

But this was not the chief matter to be amended in the generation Philpot. It had never been said that any member of it had been improvident, as far as concerned himself, but folks who have a turn for hounds and horses, however they may pay their own way, have not always a turn for paying the

way for those who come after them. The property was entailed and never encumbered, and every one of the possessors had fully intended to lay by for the younger branches, some day or other, but unluckily they all died before that day arrived. Consequently, up to the time of Tom and his brothers and sisters, the Philpot share of the good things of the world had fallen entirely to the squire for the time being, and the rest of the family might have been likened to the scraps of waste paper in the tail of a kite, which, shape it as you will, is thereby proclaimed to be no genuine bird.

It remained for Tom to make the first move for clearing away this reproach, and the good fellow did it in a manner so unusual, that we are almost afraid our mention of it will look like an endeavour "to draw men as they ought to be, not as they are." He succeeded his father shortly before he had reached the popular age of twenty-one, and the tribe went on living under the same roof, in all respects as it had done heretofore; his two younger brothers and his two sisters having the established prospects of those who had gone before them; which is to say, the very ample ones that expand in the regions of chance. They were quite contented, knowing that such was the Philpot ordinance, and felt that no arrangement could be happier; but Tom thought otherwise. Still he said nothing till the day on which his next brother reached the twenty-first birthday; a day which, to him, seemed pretty much the same as all other days. But it was not by any means so. On that

day Tom communicated to him a fact which he had learnt on winding up his father's affairs, and this fact was that his father, who was too jovial an old man to trouble his head about anything but hounds and haystacks, had omitted to renew the entail of the paternal acres, leaving them by will, which he probably thought the same thing, and thus conveying them absolutely to Tom.

Well, what did Tom do? On the day in question he handed over the fifth part of these acres to his brother; and, to shorten as much as we can this account of his singular want of respect for the time-honoured claims of primogeniture, we may as well throw together the other three destitutes, to whom three more shares were devoted in like manner. He was now as happy as if he had inherited a hundred thousand a year; and having seen his brothers established in respectable business, and his sisters suitably married, trod his fifth share and the family hall with no care at heart but the dispersion of those he had provided for, whose fortunes had divided them in far different directions.

All this Crowley had heard, not only from his aunt, but by the bed-side of the Vicar; from the old man himself, as far as he could articulate, from Lucy (who spoke of Tom with a frankness which certainly did not look like anything beyond friendship), from the two doctors, and likewise from two or three chance visitors at the Rosary. As he approached Huntsmore Lodge he revolved it well in his mind. If he had a peculiarity, it was—as we believe we have already said—a more than

common generosity, and he felt that to come between this poor fellow and his hopes, if he had any, would be an unworthy presumption upon his own superior pretensions, and a cruelty from which he could derive no happiness. On the contrary, Tom should have as fair a chance of success as could be given him, and not a syllable should be breathed in his own interest till it was clear that such chance was hopeless.

A short turning from his road brought him to the door of Huntsmore Lodge. We have no desire to say much in its description. It was a perpetration of the reign of Queen Anne, built close upon the road, and entered by a step down instead of a step up. Large enough and gloomy enough to prove the lonely occupant quite proof against superstition, and not materially improved in shape by Tom himself, who had pulled down one half to repair the other. The old-fashioned ornamental bell, that looked like a crooked skeleton, seemed averse to strangers, and was a long time before it would announce one; when it did so, it was with a rusty scream that made the horses cock their ears for a start; and, some minutes afterwards, the door was forced open by a lad in a stable dress, with eyes and mouth a-gape for something wonderful. It was Tom's whipper-in, who, between whiles, acted as footman and butler, valet and what not.

Mr. Philpot was at home, and Crowley was ushered into a low damp entrance, used as an armoury for every known implement of sport, and decorated with a good many of its trophies, which,

with the assistance of the moth, had an effect rather spectral. The room into which he passed from this museum was a little less dismal, and perhaps, to a sporting bachelor, might have been very comfortable, for it contained everything he had ever wanted or ever could want, all studiously arranged by the valet after the manner in which he littered his horses.

Tom was sitting with his back to the door, and his face bent down to some minute work on a table, so that he was not aware of a visitor, and was taken by surprise. On recognising Crowley his face shared a good deal in the confusion of his surroundings. Fortunately he had one hand disengaged to receive a friendly shake; the other he held at a respectful distance, with the thumb and finger pressed together, as if he had been about to take a pinch of snuff, but it turned out that they held something more dangerous. He was, in fact, as he said when he had expressed his thankfulness for Mr. Crowley's very kind and unexpected call, employed in tying a few ginger hackles to catch a trout or two for poor Mr. Bloomer.

"I find, Mr. Philpot, you are always occupied in good offices for your neighbours, which makes me the more ashamed of myself for not having expressed my own obligations several days ago. But you are aware, I daresay, that on the morning after you were good enough to do my commission to Miss Longland, I was suddenly installed as doctor's assistant at the vicarage. Every disposable moment has been passed there, which I am sure

you will excuse for the good tidings I bring you of the Vicar and Miss Longland, and her friend Miss Lightfoot."

Tom was full of thanks and rejoicings, but Crowley remarked that something brought a flush in his face, and that he turned his back as he spoke, to clear a chair of several articles more appropriate to his wardrobe.

"I was in hopes," resumed Crowley, ascribing the flush to the cause maintained by Mrs. Toogood, "that we should have the advantage of your assistance under these alarming circumstances, for you know I am a mere stranger, and my consolations could be of very little value; but I have been informed that, in common with all the friends of Miss Longland, not even excepting Miss Lightfoot, you have found the vicarage no more to your taste than mine."

"It is quite true," replied Tom, "that I am not distinguished by the good-will of Mrs. Bloomer, who only accords it on condition that you accept none from anybody else. I could only have gone there on pain of being turned out, and have been obliged to obtain intelligence by waylaying the servants."

"I am happy, Mr. Philpot, that future enquiries may be made with less trouble, as the Vicar is about to change his abode for an indefinite time to Oaken-dell, accompanied by Miss Longland, Miss Lightfoot, and Mrs. Toogood. One of the chief objects of my visit here this morning is to express a hope that, as a party of such friends is likely to be agreeable to

you, I may reckon upon being very often favoured by your assistance in its entertainment. My aunt will let you know when the doctor allows Mr. Bloomer to come, and on that day, and as many after it as you may chance to be disengaged, I trust we may have the pleasure of your company to dinner, and at all times when you are so disposed."

Whatever might have been the nature of Tom's first flush, there was no doubt about the second.

"Disengaged! Oh, he had no engagements; and, if he had, they would have been of no importance whatever—not the slightest. He should have the greatest possible—very much indeed—of doing himself the particular—"

So that point being settled, Crowley turned his attention to one or two others which were of not much less consequence to his plans for giving Tom a fair start against himself. The first of these was the important article of costume, in which Tom had certainly room for improvement, but it was a puzzling theme to introduce. A portrait, however, of a hearty old gentleman, who turned out to be the last Squire Philpot, and was as creditable an effort of a gifted glazier in the next town as we usually expect to find under rural patronage, led to it very naturally.

"The fashions," said Crowley, without seeming to notice the peculiar fashion of the old gentleman's son Thomas, "have strange vicissitudes. It cannot be very many years since that portrait was painted, and yet how different they are now. I hope we may at last be coming to a stand, and that the world is

beginning to think the best criterion of fashion to be the best fit, so that when we are dressed we may be able to take Lord Chesterfield's advice, and forget we are dressed at all."

"I wish to heaven *I* could, Mr. Crowley! It would be a great blessing; but Broome Warren is an out-of-the-way place, and I'm afraid there is not much chance of improvement in anything, especially amongst the tailors."

"Indeed."

"Yes, especially amongst them: for instead of allowing me to forget I am dressed, they make me remember it every moment of my life."

"Really. In what way?"

"Why, they cut the waistcoat so high, and the waistband so low, that there's no making them meet without a strain of the braces that galls one like the withers of a dog-horse. No moving an arm without establishing a raw, and no standing upright without risking every button at once!"

"You surprise me! I should have thought that such fashions must subject you to dangerous hazards in mounting your horse."

"Oh, that's the greatest misery of all. I am always obliged to insist upon long coat tails."

This was a little too much for Crowley's gravity, and even Tom could scarcely control a look of dismal drollery.

"I have often," he continued, "thought of putting myself in other hands, but I don't know where to go. We know nothing and nobody down here, and

go on in the same rough road for ever, because we have worn the ruts too deep to get out of them."

"I have often heard similar complaints, for there are many people who would rather endure a life of pain than exert themselves a moment for relief. It is immensely hard, in prospect, to break through old habits. I have found it so myself, but, having faced the trial, I have always found it existed merely in imagination. With regard to the tailors, I should recommend the measurement of a London artist, and would guarantee that you might afterwards wear your coat tails of any length you please."

Tom looked wistfully, for he thought that if he only had Crowley's tailor, he might in some degree resemble him; and Crowley had soon a fair opportunity of laying him under obligations, by writing the address on the back of his own card, feeling satisfied that reasonable amends might be made to the country practitioner by a few recommendations about the 5th of November.

He then addressed himself to another item of Tom's necessities; and observing a few tattered books on a pendant shelf, asked whether he could recommend him anything new, but Tom's plight in that respect was worse than it had been in the former one, though he was equally frank.

"To say the truth," he replied, "the fashion for reading has penetrated as little into these parts as the genius for tailoring, and our family have

never introduced any innovation. They have always thought that they got on very well without it, and saw no reason why their sons could not do the same. A few books on farming and farriery, and such things as applied to their own pursuits, they had no objection to; but for anything else, they left us to choose for ourselves, considering that if we had a turn for deeper studies it would show itself, like the poppies in the stubble, which spring up in proportion to the absence of cultivation."

The illustration would perhaps have been more just if poppies had not been weeds, and so thought Tom; but home-spun ornaments may be excused for a loose stitch, when we see so many ragged examples of higher pretensions.

"My father, however," he pursued, "did send us to school in the next town till we were old enough to be of use in trapping pole-cats and weasels. But nothing ever came of it except the canings. My mother had kept us at home till we grew too restive to be managed, and after the first year Dr. Leather-head sent us back, with the intimation that it was of no use to model with clay that had become as hard as a stone. He had done his best to beat it into a malleable state, but these mollifying applications had only left a few external traces, like the raddle on our sheep, and the stamps upon our bullocks, to distinguish us from the cattle of other people. My father was quite contented, for he had no desire that we should be idling over books, when he wanted us with the hounds, and we were dutiful

enough to think him always in the right. I beg your pardon, Mr. Crowley, for this family history, but it is right that I should show you how little you will find in me. Of books, I believe, I don't know the names of a dozen, I wish I did."

"Then pray allow me to place my own library, which has been brought down to Oakendell, and is very good and very miscellaneous, entirely at your disposal. Fashions, as I have said, are continually changing, and, just at present, there is a very prevailing one for reading the works of the day. I have observed that ladies particularly have taken it up so eagerly, that there is no road so short, or so certain to their attention, as a disquisition upon the last new publication. You will find most of them upon my shelves, and I hope you will always carry off what you like, whether I am at home or not. And now I must wish you good morning, for I have a good many preparations to make."

He thought this enough for the first lesson towards qualifying Tom for conquest, and got up to depart. Tom saw him to his conveyance with unbounded thanks for the honour he had done him, and the great advantage he should derive from it. He then returned to his ginger hackles, full of admiration of his new friend, and very much improved in opinion of himself for having been thought worthy of so long a visit.

But he could not tie his flies ; he was quite in a flutter about something else, which might have been guessed by his frequent recurrence to the address of the tailor, and having pinned his thumb and finger

together with a little crooked Limerick hook, he came to the conclusion that he should catch no fish that day. There was no knowing how soon he might be called upon to shine at Oakendell, or how long Messrs. Schneiders and Co. might take to equip him for it. So he folded up his ginger hackles, sucked his punctured fingers, and struggled into his last provincial cut, after which he summoned his factotum, and ordered his dog-cart.

“If anybody should want me, say I am gone to London to be meas—on particular business—and just look about for my cobbler’s wax.”

He forgot that he had been raking his hair to stir up his wits for conversation, and afterwards found the missing treasure where he was not likely to miss it again for some time.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE improvements at Oakendell had made a rapid advance. A confidential servant who had been left in London had brought down the needful supply of servants, and the remainder of the horses were installed safely in the renovated stables. The house was handsomely furnished, the ruined garden turfed, gravelled, and tastefully fenced in from the forest, and complete in everything but the flowers. As far, however, as the nearest florist could fill the beds with such as were transferable, and surround the walls with all his varieties of blooming stands, there was no cause for complaint. The handsome old house looked as if it had never been destitute of dwellers of the better class, and was the centre of hues and odours, with which its long despairing mistress could not fail to be enchanted. Crowley was certainly so by anticipation.

He did not see Mrs. Rokins and pretty Susan, for they had trudged down to the Rosary, two or three days before, for his honour's washing, and had been made happy by another conversation with him.

“Now, Mrs. Rokins,” he had said, “I leave you and pretty Sukey the entire charge of preparing the apartments for the young ladies, who must be placed within chatting distance; because, you know, young ladies have always a great deal to say to each other when there’s nobody to tell what it is.”

“Lord love your Honour!” replied the laughing dame, “how did you find that out?”

Sukey also laughed, and rather slyly, as if she thought he must have heard some edifying little dialogues.

“And remember, Mrs. Rokins, the old gentleman must be established close by. As for Mrs. Toogood, she must have the best room you can find her, but as far as possible from our other friends, for fear of being troubled with their secrets.”

And obliged, thought mother and daughter, who were well aware of Mrs. Toogood’s propensities, to keep them awake all night with advice to go to sleep.

“Never you fear, your Honour,” said the former. “I know well enough what Miss Lucy would like; and she shall be better off than ever she was yet. But, when all’s done, we can be of more service in our own little home than ever we can be at Oakendell; for your ladies and gentlemen in the servants’ hall understand everything a great deal better, and Sukey and I must go and set about your Honour’s washing. We shan’t be far off, and the cot wants airing, and the tubs want scrubbing, and

a deal of other things want doing which is more in our way."

"As you please, Mrs. Rokins ; but remember, you both belong to me, or I to you, and we'll help one another along as well as we can."

"Lord ha' mercy!" exclaimed the good woman, as they turned away with their baskets. "I never see such a gentleman, nor Miss Lucy neither."

Intelligence flies quickly in remote parts where there are few rival incidents, and that which respected Oakendell had made a wide circuit. Crowley found on his hall table, amongst the usual cards from tradespeople—including Tom's tailor, who referred him to that gentleman's recommendation—a collection of others which showed that he was not destined to enjoy the seclusion he had promised himself. A new resident whose name and family were so well known, was too great a windfall in the provinces to be indulged with such out-of-the-way fancies, and the county families from all distances had lost no time in calling. But not many of them are connected with our history, and those that are will appear when they are wanted. The first attention was due to Lady Goldfield, whose letter, it may be remembered, had tempted him to that part of the country. There was nothing to prevent him from disposing of the rest of his day by a drive to Goldsworthy Park ; and thither he bent his way.

The prospect of a pleasant visit created some diversion in his painful thoughts, and the breezy sunshine over a wild tract of blooming heath, amid the carol of larks and linnets, did equal good to the

damaged state of his nerves. By degrees he made some attempt to persuade himself that it was full soon to determine whether the flying shot from Lucy's eyes had really been fatal, or only a near miss. That he felt her to be different from everyone else was sure enough, but it was the quality of all rarities to fix an interest till their rarity ceased. We cannot correctly estimate the brightness of one star till we compare it with another, and perhaps some of the young celebrities of Goldsworthy might be visiting their mother. At all events, he should enjoy some relief in the conversation of Lady Goldfield after the depressing sedatives of Aunt Too-good.

The park and mansion of Goldsworthy wanted none of the features which give grandeur and romance to many another seat of our noble families; but as we do not set up in opposition to the Tourist's Guide Book, and are, moreover, fearful of exceeding the proportions which history can allow to description, we leave rolling forests and shining streams, and columns and terraces, to the illustrations of that highly attractive work.

Crowley alighted amongst the statues and exotics that crowded the stately portal, and was conducted through a line of tall telegraphs from vestibule to hall, and from hall to gallery till his name was caught by another tall telegraph, like the wicket keeper in a cricket match. But before we go farther we will just anticipate what sort of a lady Lady Goldfield was to prove.

Of course she must be lofty and dignified, and

spreading like one of the mighty beech trees we have just passed, and feathering over the velvet with excess of foliage, radiant with smiles, redoubtable for their conscious favour, appalling in affability, and about fifty-five years old. Of course her courtly condescensions are the rapture of the county; of course Justice Bulfinch and his brothers of the bench are never tired of proclaiming how they are invited to dinner once a quarter, and of course the entranced families of the doctor and the curate are desolate when their dear Countess goes to town for the season. She has indeed twice the merit of ladies in a lower grade, for she is an excellent person of one sort in the country, and an excellent person of quite another sort in the world of fashion. In the former, she is the splendid three-decker laid up in ordinary, with her fleet of frigates waiting to be put in commission, and all the cock boats of the harbour collected under her lee; at Almack's she is the flag ship, leading the frigates into action, and looking out for prizes; and a great deal too deep in her tactics to hoist a signal to the small craft she left in port. If they ever get adrift in those high latitudes we very much fear she may chance to run them down. It is awful navigation through the Straits of May Fair, and there is no anchorage at all for small vessels in the Gulf of Belgravia. The mighty ship could never shorten sail to take the Justice Bulfinch in tow, and the curate's light keels would be omens more disastrous than Mother Carey's Chicken.

Shall we see any likeness to this stereotyped dow-

ager in our Countess at Goldsworthy ? The gentleman in waiting announces Mr. James Crowley, who is gratified by a lively exclamation of surprise, and received with a smile very much too genuine to have ever wreathed or writhed in masquerade. She is very fair, very simply, but very elegantly, attired, has a mere trifle of that roundness of form so becoming to a fine figure that has seen some forty years, and her hair is dark and glossy as it was on her wedding day. To which we may add the still more attractive charms of a graceful vivacity of manner, and a voice which can only have been modulated by something better than good taste. We believe none ever saw her without admiration, or knew her without loving.

Crowley being a near relation and loved from a boy, much of the subsequent conversation may be dispensed with till he was rather archly catechised upon the motives of his unaccountable retreat to the seclusion of a wild forest. Lady Goldfield had heard of his wondrous taste in decorating the romantic old house, and that all the country had been ransacked for the choicest flowers. She was not before aware that young single gentlemen had such a passion for them ; and, if it extended to *orange blossoms*, would immediately supply him with trees in full bloom.

Crowley laughed and shook his head, glancing at her beautiful braids as if he thought he knew where orange blossoms would be more in place.

“ You do not value them ? Well, I am disappointed ; but I am still very happy that you are

so far an exception to club life that you can remember what good you may gain by the supervision of your venerable aunt. Am I still at fault? Then I must imagine that you are worn out with London dissipations, as I am myself, though you have not been their victim quite so long, and I hope you mean to continue in the same mind. I have made up my own to live chiefly where we are, now that my girls have chosen their lots in life, and to seek happiness where it is not made a matter of competition."

"You have always looked forward to it, and I believe I may say that your determination gave the first suggestion for mine; though I hardly expected it would be so well kept when there were so many to lament it. You will not doubt how sincerely I was one of the number."

"Ah! my dear James! it is often the fate of poor womankind to begin the world anew. I never had any view but the happiness of my children, and, as that is now assured, the wrench from those habits is not so severe as it may seem. I should be more lonely in the crowd I have left than in this comparative solitude. There I should no longer have a motive in life, and here I have many, with the hope that I win love without cost, instead of toiling for it vainly at a great deal."

"You never toiled in vain, though the case is rare, for fashion is a contest in which few will dispute that the stake is greater than the prize; the one being never more than envy, and the other seldom less than peace of mind. Yet even miseries,

long endured, will sometimes become indispensable. The most *blasé* railer against the emptiness of fashion has generally the least courage to emancipate himself, and would die of dejection if he could. I never thought you could be so patient under the oppression of pure happiness."

"You praise me too soon; for I will not deny that there are occasional moments when the lights of mind that career in your Elysian miasmas would very much brighten this better atmosphere, and that solitude would be much pleasanter if it consisted of something more than nobody. I have been considering if the range of my country acquaintance would furnish me with some gifted girl, like my own, to restore me to the duties which have lost their occupation. But I know of none who have not either more cherished prospects, or else too little promise for a constant companion. I must engage you to look out for me. But, in the meantime, how does the dear aunt whose advice you are not good enough to take?"

"Upon my word," replied Crowley, "you do me wrong, for I am just going to take a great deal. She is coming to stay with me, and to bring the poor old Vicar of Broome Warren, who has been seriously ill, and also two young friends."

"I was very sorry to hear of his illness, though I do not know him. I did not like the description I heard of Mrs. Bloomer, and was afraid of making her acquaintance. But who are the young friends?"

"One of them is a Miss Lightfoot, very pleasant,

very sensible; and if I may add so much without incurring suspicion, very pretty."

"And who is the other?"

"The other is Mr. Bloomer's niece, who has lived with him from infancy, and comes to be his nurse."

"Miss Bloomer?"

"No—her name is Longland. She is the daughter of Sir Harry Longland, of Broome Warren Chase, who fell into difficulties many years ago, and was obliged to take refuge somewhere abroad, from whence he has never returned."

"Poor girl! I have some remembrance of that misfortune, but it was before we came to this property, and I never heard the particulars. How came Sir Harry not to take his daughter with him?"

"He was hardly pressed, and had great confidence in the Vicar."

"Who scarcely proved himself worthy of the trust, by marrying a person so unfit to bring her up. I wish I had known of this; but all our friends avoid Broome Warren. Yet, surely, Mrs. Toogood might have told me."

"My aunt has been very kind; but we know too well that she has always projects of her own, and never believes them intelligible to any one else. Nevertheless, in spite of all disadvantages, I am persuaded that Miss Longland is just the person to win your regard. She is very much beloved by all who know her, and has a great deal of mind, entirely and highly cultivated by her own efforts."

"Poor girl!" repeated Lady Goldfield. "Is she pretty, like her friend?"

"She is certainly very beautiful."

"When do they come to you?"

"I don't know the exact day; but very soon."

"I hope she will not think me troublesome if I come to explain the cause of my long seeming neglect. I could have endured many Mrs. Bloomers to give the forlorn girl such solace as she might have found here."

Crowley began to indulge some hope that fortune was making a tack, and turning off from the breakers. To have gained such sympathy for Lucy was like the beginning of a breeze of some promise; and he entered, as far as he could, into her history, without touching upon those parts of it which so much disturbed him; not omitting the accidental circumstances under which they became acquainted, or very skilfully concealing the impression she had made upon him. But Lady Goldfield made no more allusion to the orange-blossoms, for she had penetration to see the case was too serious; and, after enjoining him to let her know the moment Lucy arrived, changed the conversation to a subject which more nearly concerned herself.

"When I wrote to you in London," she said, "to say how much I desired your company here, I am sure you gave me credit for no selfish motive beyond the pleasure of seeing you,—a motive which has existed from very early days,—but I must now tell you that I had an additional one, for I want you to render me a service for which I can depend on no

one else. I am in trouble about my son. You have not seen much of him since he was a boy, for he went to Oxford after you left it, and fell amongst bad associates whose ambition was to be thought fast. Without showing any want of abilities, and with many of the good qualities which distinguished his father, I fear he wants others to direct them. He has seldom been here since he succeeded to his large inheritance, and on the last occasion I observed a change of manner and expression which betokened some pre-occupation of mind, and a cautious avoidance of inquiry into its cause. I have since heard that some of his favourite companions have made themselves remarkable in what are called sporting circles, and am naturally apprehensive that he may be doing the same; but I know not how to learn the truth. Inquiries would betray mistrust, and I cannot go to him entirely alone, for his house is far away, and I have no friend whose company would be desirable on such a visit; neither could I take a servant to bring back discreditable contrasts between my only son and such a father. In this anxiety I have felt there is no one to whom I can look but yourself; and I know you will not think I ask too much of you, although the favour is not a small one. I have pleased myself with the idea that you will be glad to comfort me by going to see him, and observing the nature of those pursuits which he thinks it puerile to confide to a mother. To you he may be more communicative; and, if he is engaged in any way injurious to his name and fortune, I

may, with your assistance, arrest him before it is too late."

"My dear Lady Goldfield, I only wish you had called upon me the first moment you imagined I might be of service. I have for some time contemplated the visit you propose; for I confess I have heard reports that he has shown a disposition for the turf and the sort of society which is considered indispensable to it. He used once to be very frank with me about his undertakings, but it is long since I have heard from him, and I have suspected that it is because he is aware there are things in which our tastes very widely differ. If he needs advice, he cannot have it too soon; and, as he once sought mine, I trust he may still be disposed to take it. I will set off to him to-morrow, and you shall see me as soon as I return."

"I never doubted your readiness. I wish I had the same happy confidence in the tidings you may bring. We have witnessed such examples of thoughtless degeneracy in these days—such rapid ruin of revered names and boundless patrimonies, for the mere bravado of defying prudence and becoming great among the worthless—that I shall tremble to see you. Whatever my worldly position may be, I am but a lone and anxious woman, who strives hard to be worthy of the past, and should be crushed, perhaps more than others, by a fall in the family reputation."

Crowley was touched by the confidence she placed in him, no less than by the sorrow in her fine countenance; but he had too little knowledge of

Lord Goldfield's present occupations to afford very cheering encouragement. The most he could do was to represent that, whatever courses might have been followed, they had not had time to reach to any dangerous extent; and, with this reliance, he succeeded in bringing the subject to an end less desponding than its commencement. He then possessed himself of all farther hints that could be given for his guidance, and took his leave, as every one else did from that house, with a very small idea of the length of his stay.

CHAPTER XVII.

HAVING no knowledge of the forest, and being lost in thought, there was no great difficulty in taking the wrong road, and this led him on to another visit and another home in distress, though not quite of the same sort. In a tangled lane, with a wilderness on each side, he came upon a small ruinous cottage, fenced in by broken palings to protect a few cabbages from the forest pigs, and exhibiting a bit of board upon a pole, with the name of "Mrs. Rokins, Washerwoman." A miserable starved pony was hanging his head by the wicket, with a vehicle at his heels, only describable under the equally mysterious denomination of a Trap ; and, within doors, was distinguishable a chorus of several angry voices. He immediately stopped and made his way to the entrance, which was open, though a clothes-horse, with linen hanging to dry, concealed the interior.

Looking over this, he was not a little surprised to see Mr. Christopher Cheek, strutting in majestic rage amongst the wash-tubs, with a brace of hang-man-like assistants awaiting his commands ; whilst whirling from one to the other, in a storm of ex-

asperation and terror, was the excellent Mrs. Rokins.

“I tell you,” she exclaimed, “it’s an imposition and a robbery! I haven’t got the rent, and I wouldn’t pay it if I had, for Mr. Cheek here knows well enough he ought to pay it hisself. Why couldn’t he let me earn my living? Ask him that! What business had he to take me and Sukey away from our work, three or four months ago, to mind his hogs at Oakendell, and never give us the value of a bad sixpence.”

“Hold your peace, Mrs. Rokins,” thundered Mr. Cheek, “and don’t suppose you are going to scold the sheriff’s officers out of their duty. They are come to have the money or the goods; and, as you won’t give the money, the goods they’ll have.”

“Will they! I should like to see ‘em!” retorted the good dame spreading a pair of hard-working red arms, dappled with soap-suds, to defend her treasures. “I tell you, if you lay hands upon a single thing you’ll have a greater fear of wash-tubs than you ever had yet; and you’ve feared ‘em long enough in all conscience, Mr. Cheek, ever since you was born, for you’ve never trusted them with more than one shirt a week—to sing Psalms of a Sunday—ever since you was born!”

“Mr. Solomon and Mr. Isaacs”—we cannot tell how it is that sheriff’s officers always hail from Jerusalem—“do your duty, and don’t be stopped by the ravings of this old mad woman!”

“Come, Missis,” said one of the Hebrew gentlemen, with wonderful eyebrows and a squint that

looked behind him, "stand aside, and be quiet, will you ?"

" I won't ! I tell you, I won't !" and her cap fell off and her grey hair tumbled about her shoulders. " I know what makes him so savage with me, I do ! It's because my daughter Sukey won't go a-nighst him for the milk which he pretended for a charity, but was only for things worser — that's what it is !"

" Take care, mother," replied the other fellow, with a nose that curled into his thick lips, " how you handle the character of a honourable gent as is a Justice of the Quorum. I must have these delicate shirts you're a-ironing, and the white waistcoats in the tub, and the trowsers, and the t'other things that's a-riding on the horse."

" You must, must you ?" shrieked Mrs. Rokins, preparing to do battle with all three. " If you durst ! If you durst ! tell you they be Squire Crowley's shirts ! And d'ye think he ain't to have a shirt to his back or a pair of — Ha ! keep your dirty fingers to scratch your heads, and never fancy they are going to make his Honour walk about stark naked. I know how it is, and so does everybody. His Honour took Oakendell without letting his worship finger the rent, or mistake Miss Lucy's dues for his own, as he has done the last dozen years. And he has lost the fields he has never paid for, and has been obliged to drive home the bullocks which he fatted for nothing, and has been made a honest man in spite of hisself. That's where it is. We all know Mr. Cheek."



“Where’s your sack, Mr. Solomon?” roared the foaming Mr. Cheek, forgetting in his fury that the bird whose plumage he was going to appropriate was the pet of his patroness, Mrs. Toogood. “Bundle everything in at once, and have a sale on Broome Warren Green.”

“And what it fetches over and above the rent, Missis, shall be returned,” added one vagabond.

“And if it don’t fetch enough, we can come again, next washing day,” superadded the other.

“You shan’t! You durstn’t!” still maintained the magnanimous old lady. “I’ve sent my Sukey to Mr. Crowley hisself. And here she is! And now you’ll see whether he’s a gentleman to stand by and see folks run away with his small clothes. Now we shall see!”

The men made a pause in their operations, as Sukey entered breathless by the back-door, to see if she had brought the rent, and Cheek looked scared at the chance of her being followed by Crowley. They were, however, more courageous than before, when the frightened girl exclaimed,—“Mother, his Honour ain’t at home! He was gone to Goldsworthy.”

“Clear out that back room first,” commanded the hard creditor. “There’s more things there, and we must have all. In with you!”

And in they went, and after them rushed the determined Mrs. Rokins. Sukey, who had overrun herself, remained panting against the wall.

“Sukey,” said Cheek, in a sly, subdued voice, “Sukey, my girl, come farther this way, and we’ll

stop all this row in a moment. Come, I say, to the door, and hear what I've got to say."

And he pulled the exhausted girl close to the clothes-horse which concealed Crowley.

"You come for the milk, Sukey, as you used to do, and I promise you it shall be all right."

And here he added a few words in a whisper, quite audible to Crowley through the flimsy partition of his own shirts, for which Sukey, concentrating all her strength for a grand effort, saluted his worship with a box on the ear, which might almost have sent him through the wall. Before he knew the precise end on which he was standing, the horse was kicked aside, and he felt a clutch upon his collar, and a shake that made his teeth chatter, followed up by a Katherine wheel evolution far amongst the cabbages.

"Well done, my little girl! You gave him a good one!" said Crowley, turning round to pretty Sukey, who had recoiled from the force of her own smack, and staggered back to a chair.

Mr. Cheek thus gaining breath to pick up his hat and adjust his necktie, glared about him to understand what had happened, and proclaimed his exploit with a yell to the catchpoles, who bounced in with Mrs. Rokins still at their skirts.

"Lord love your Honour's handsome face!" she cried. "I was sure you'd come! Now take his Honour's clothes off his back! Now have a sale on Broome Warren Green! Now leave him without a stocking to his foot, or a night-cap to his head! I should like to see you! I should!—I should!"

"Take notice!" bellowed the justice, with his features distorted out of humanity, and discoloured as if he had made a dive in the soap-suds, with a dash of blue starch in them. "Take notice! I have been assaulted in my magisterial duty!"

"Your duty!" cried the dishevelled Sukey, starting up like a little volcano. "Was it your duty to tell how you were to be bought off, with your two thieves? Was it your duty to sell justice, and at such a price, you wicked, filthy old man? You've got it at last, and I only wish his Honour had shaken your head off!"

"Hold your tongue; you squalling termagant. And take notice, Mother Rokins, that you have this house under *me*, as agent to the property, and that I order you to quit, bag and baggage, to-morrow morning! To-morrow morning, Mother Rokins!"

"I shan't quit to-morrow morning, nor next day neither! I defy you! Turn me out if you durst! I hold this cot for my life from Sir Harry's blessed self, and under his own hand. Get over that! Get over that if you can!"

"Take notice, Mr. Solomon, and you, Mr. Isaacs, I've been assaulted in the execution of my duty. I, a magistrate of the county. Take notice, I never shook him in return. Take notice, it was all on one side! I'm ready to make oath I never touched him!"

"But if you don't take care of yourself," interrupted Crowley, "I shall be obliged to touch *you* again. So make your way out of Mrs. Rokins' premises, or I shall most assuredly help you."

" You hear him, Mr. Solomon ! You hear him, Mr. Isaacs ! and can bear witness that I never threatened Mr. Crowley ! You shall hear of it, Mr. Crowley ! you shall hear of it !"

And, with that, Mr. Cheek stamped furiously out of the gate, attended by his followers, with a loud, alternate jargon about the sheriff and his officers, assaults, batteries, penalties, and the county jail. They all tumbled into Mr. Cheek's equipage, and went off as fast as the poor raw bones could jolt them over the ruts, flogging him all the way as heartily as if he had been Mr. James Crowley.

Not the least difficulty encountered by him was to keep off the transports of Mrs. Rokins, whose triumph and admiration incited her very strongly to fling her arms about his neck, soap-suds and all; and he made matters more perilous by his handsome recognition of her brave defence of his wardrobe. Modest little Sukey stood hiding her face in the background, full of shame at having been so prominent, dropping curtsies without number, and murmuring to herself how ardently she hoped his Honour's arm would be as strong for the next hundred years. And then his Honour presented a hand to each of them, and jumped into his curriicle, very much amused with his tournament, and very little caring what might be its consequences.

Certainly, Mr. Cheek's treatment was trying to the feelings of a gentleman who, for so many years, had esteemed himself the first in Broome Warren, and expected every one else to do so. The speed of his retreat appeared to cause these feelings to

flare up more fiercely, and the increased action of the air set him in a conflagration. He very soon flogged the lash off his whip, when the pony, finding his driver had exhausted all persuasion for a gallop, followed the example of Miss Pen's Edward, and stood still. Messrs. Solomon and Isaacs being thus relieved from the necessity of holding their breath, and whatever else they could catch, began to be active in the application of extinguishers; though the flames, as the firemen say, had got too far ahead.

"Mr. Sheeks, your worship," said the first of these comforters, "I think we have made a very good day's work; for, if we have not got the goods, we have got the shakings, and we shall have the damages."

"Yes, your worship," said the other, "and they will be in proportion to the violence of the shakings; for which, if I was you, I should be much obliged—very—and I wish I had got such a swing-swanging myself. I saw it from the first, but I would not interfere, because I was in hopes he would do it again."

Cheek was in no mood to exult, and so he cursed them both for not having done their duty with more dispatch.

"Don't you be angry with your good fortune," was the advice of Mr. Solomon. "Consider you are Justice of the Peace, and such luck never happened before! It will be fifty or a hundred pounds in your pocket."

"No, don't you be angry, Mr. Sheek," was the

consolation of Mr. Isaacs. "I will take my oath before the judge and jury that he shook your worship very nearly almost into nothing at all."

"The devil take you both!" exploded Mr. Cheek's gratitude, whilst he took the small end of his whip to belabour the poor pony with the handle. "I promised you, if you did your duty, a sovereign a-piece; but, as you only stood by and stared, I wouldn't give you sixpence to save you from hanging!"

"Oh yes, your worship would!" said both at once, with a smile and a wink at each other.

"Oh yes," continued Solomon, in a solo. "Your worship would never break your word when we ran such a risk for you."

"Oh no," snuffled Isaacs, through his crooked nose; "when you put our conscience to such a trial; for your worship knows that the penalty for bribing a sheriff's-officer is five hundred pounds."

Cheek was turning round upon them with another volley of reproaches, but stopped short and changed his mind. His friends knew their trade better than he thought.

"Bribe!" he exclaimed; "whoever dreamt of confounding a recompense with a bribe? A recompense which neither of you deserve; and I tell you again, that I wouldn't give a sixpence to save you from hanging, if I hadn't promised. A promise is a promise—no gentleman breaks a promise."

"Oh," replied Eyebrows, smiling deferentially, "we know your worship never does."

"Oh," continued Snuffle, "everybody knows it is

quite impossible ; and, as we've come to our turning home, perhaps your worship will be good enough to hand over the recompense." And they both held out their immaculate palms,

Check magnanimously thrust his hand in his breeches-pocket, and drew out two sovereigns, resisting like two eye-teeth. He had the gratification of receiving two bows of polite acknowledgment, which he returned as politely to the tail of his pony with another whack from the handle of his whip, at the same time jerking the rein with all his might to "shoot them" on their path. As they descended, they bowed and twitched off their hats, but had another word to say in behalf of Mrs. Rokins, whom he might also think entitled to a slight recompense.

"Mrs. Rokins ! What have you to do with Mrs. Rokins ?"

"Oh, no more than his worship had to do with her daughter ! Only she might take it into her head that the execution in her cottage was not strictly according to law, seeing that she claimed wages to a much greater amount than her rent—that was all—excepting that Sukey might want a trifle for something else."

It is lucky that the grand agent of evil is not always at leisure to take charge of his consignments, or Messrs. Solomon and Isaacs would have had cause to rue the day when they made game of Justice Cheek. The parting was brief and bitter ; and the pony finding himself lightened of two substantial passengers, and being fully sensible of many weighty reasons for putting his best leg foremost,

plunged off with a will that very soon conveyed his driver out of sight and hearing.

"I tell you what, Isaacs," said Mr. Solomon, "we had better go back and make it up with Mrs. Rokins, for our work this morning may get us into trouble."

"I was just thinking so," returned Mr. Isaacs "and have something in my head which we can puzzle out as we go."

Whereupon they squared their elbows and retraced their steps.

Cheek returned home with his ideas so rudely tempest-tossed, that there seemed small chance of their ever floating in the same whirlpool again, unless upon a high tide of gin-and-water; but the tide of that day brought nothing to speak of, and only increased the commotion. It was almost dark when Nelly went in to remind him that he had not dined, and to inquire whether he would have his dinner or his supper, because both were ready.

He grumbled out that he did not want either; but seeing that he was in one of his absent fits, which were of very frequent occurrence, she remained in the room, as if expecting that he would presently change his mind, and she had not been long observing him, before she perceived that his abstraction was more than usual. She was a girl of sharp understanding, and had seen, very soon after she came into his service, that besides his general desire to be thought a man of consequence, there was some particular object of ambition which occupied him more than anything else, and to which his

great straining for important estimation seemed subservient. She had seen that his fears for this estimation had been very much alarmed by Crowley's engagement of a property over which he had assumed the control. The singular visit of Aaron had likewise given his confidence a shake, and a much greater one, and so had Mrs. Bloomer's ignominious dismissal in face of the crowd, over whom he had so long domineered. Captain Cox's mysterious visit had caused him a new convulsion with downward tendency, and he had come home, four or five hours ago, with some terrible provocation, which had overset him like a little earthquake. Altogether she suspected that affairs at Green Lane's End were fast converging to a *coup d'état*. Her real object in remaining was to tell him, as soon as he was inclined to listen, the discovery she had communicated to Polly Lightfoot the night before, and which she had not been able to tell him, as she had engaged, because she found on her return that he was fast asleep, and this morning, he had gone out too early to prepare his operations against Mrs. Rokins. She was about to assist her observations by reminding him of the commission he had given her, and which other matters had driven out of his head, when, just under his window, a burst of unearthly music, composed of cow's horns and frying pans, made him spring from his arm-chair as if he would have sprung through the ceiling.

“What the —— is that?” he shouted. “Go along and see.”

Nelly went out, and was absent a few minutes during which the strain sometimes gave way to a colloquy, and sometimes made him jump again with more stunning clamour, in the midst of which Nelly came back, with something between a laugh and a sneer, and said it was nothing at all.

“Nothing at all! What is it, I say?”

“Nothing; only the reason why you didn’t want your dinner.”

“Death and fury! and what reason is that? Can’t you speak?”

“Well, if you must have it, it is Jack Rokins, who got to his mother’s just after you left, and has brought all the other boys to play the tune they say you danced to.”

Mr. Cheek seized his blackthorn, and made a sortie from his garrison, but only charged through the perils of his farm-yard, to see the enemy retreat, and hear a wild hurrah for Squire Crowley. Panting and raging with disappointment, he had hardly time to resume his seat, when a rattle at the house-door brought another interruption. This was an express from Lympton, bearing a letter of large dimensions for Christopher Cheek, Esq., J.P., &c., &c.

Wondering what it could be, but persuaded it must have some connection with magisterial affairs, he broke the seal in expectation of reading something to impress Nelly with a more profound reverence than she was likely to entertain from the proclamations of Jack Rokins.

“Sir,” it began, “We are instructed by Mrs. Rokins—”

Here he moderated his tone, and read only for his own enjoyment, for all that Nelly could gather was that she had never seen a gentleman look so astonished.

“Sir,” he began again to himself, “We are instructed by Mrs. Rokins on her own part, and likewise on the part of Miss Susan Rokins, her daughter, to request immediate payment of two shillings per week for each of these ladies for the care of a certain mansion and outbuildings, known as Oakendell House, during the last three months, and another payment for soap, sandpaper, mops, and scrubbing brushes, and sundry other appliances for the renovation of the same, the whole amounting to £14 13s. 3½d., deducting therefrom £1 10s., the same being the half-yearly amount of rent, due last Saturday se’night, for the dwelling house and appurtenances occupied by them in that portion of the forest denominated Dead Man’s Lane.

“Irrespective of the above, we beg to give notice that we are further instructed to commence an action for forcible entrance upon the last named premises, and an attempt to make seizure of certain wearing apparel, the property of James Crowley, Esq., of Oakendell House, in this county, under warrant of a writ obtained by false pretences, and involving certain wrongful affidavits.

“Totally unconnected with the foregoing, we have the painful duty of announcing yet another prosecution on the part of Miss Susan Rokins, for damages in a case of most alarming personal outrage.

“Being always averse to litigation, when it may be possible to arrive at amicable adjustment, we beg leave to add, entirely and exclusively on our own parts, and altogether without direction, consent, privity, or prejudice to our clients, that if these highly serious matters can, in any way, be satisfactorily arranged without going into court, the county, and especially the bench of magistrates, will be spared a great scandal.

“We have the honour to remain, sir,

“Your most obedient humble servants,

“FOX AND FERRET.”

This was, no doubt, the something which tickled the heads of Messrs. Isaacs and Solomon when they parted from his worship, and took their way to Mrs. Rokins.

There is no need to record Mr. Cheek's remarks upon it.

It is a great mercy that storms produce calms, and that calms are more durable. The particular storm in the brains of Mr. Cheek had the effect of dispelling very much of their late unsettled weather, and gave him a clear and defined view of the line of his future proceedings. Nelly's surmises in respect to some stupendous plan had been quite correct. There was no delaying another day, and, the determination once made, the best means of carrying it out so wholly occupied his mind, that the storm soon rumbled off in the distance, and left him in silent and deep reflection. Nelly remained

with him for orders till she had the satisfaction of seeing him snuff the candle with his fingers, and heard him muttering as he went up stairs to bed, "To-morrow or never!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE morning that succeeded Mr. Cheek's day of provocations was a very fine one, but he lay longer than usual in his bed, revolving some difficulties which it was necessary to overcome in the way to his grand design. The chief of these was to find the opportunity for it. But Fortune seemed to think she had been rather hard with him of late, and dropped in upon one of those visits of capricious good nature for which she often omits to give any particular reason. On this occasion she was the bearer of an early note from Mrs. Toogood, which Nelly slipped under the door with a knock and an intimation that it was half-past ten o'clock. Mr. Cheek rubbed his eyes and started up, in expectation that the events of yesterday had leagued his staunch patroness with the rest of the world; though he ought to have known by that time that the way of the world was always her strongest reason for taking another.

"Mrs. Toogood," said the note, for her most friendly communications never confounded the difference of classes by more familiar beginnings, "is

extremely shocked to learn from her maid that Mr. Cheek was yesterday very grievously ill-used by her nephew, Mr. Crowley. Being informed that he is this morning gone to London, she will be glad to see Mr. Cheek at eleven o'clock to hear the circumstances of an outrage which her long knowledge of Mr. Cheek assures her must have been totally unprovoked, with a view of suggesting to her nephew an apology adequate to the offence. As Miss Longland is much concerned in entertaining a just appreciation of a gentleman so confidentially engaged for her father, and as Mr. Cheek must be discouraged by the extraordinary behaviour of Mrs. Bloomer from calling at the Vicarage to explain the facts, the bearer of this note will convey Mrs. Toogood's request that the young lady will oblige her by walking up at the same hour."

Mr. Cheek saw no more impediment in his way, and set to work at his toilet with a resolution which concluded it with more than ordinary perfection in the brief space of ten minutes. He had no leisure for breakfast, and was out of the house with a haste which made Nelly believe he was out of his wits also. His direction was the Rosary, but he had something else in prospect, for he stopped half-way to it and took a seat by the road side amongst the high broome, in which he could only be perceived by those who came close upon him. Here he looked over the landscape, with the glance of a kite over some projected pounce, and excited to a degree which obliged him to undo a button or two of his waistcoat.

For what was he waiting ? Many people would have thought twice before passing such a face in such a lonely spot ; for it was full a quarter-of-a-mile of wilderness, both from the village and the residence of Mrs. Toogood. Least of all would they have wished him to be met by Lucy Longland ; but Lucy it was who was destined for the encounter, and presently she appeared. Her light step was not heard till she came full upon him, when he clambered up upon his feet and pulled off his four-and-sixpenny with a jaunty air and his most pre-possessing smile. The surprise caused her to start and colour up. She had always felt a great dislike to his expression, and his visage at that moment was not calculated to remove it.

“ Good morning, my dear Miss Lucy,” he began ; “ it is some time since I had the happiness of seeing you, and I rejoice to find you looking so well after your long attendance upon Mr. Bloomer. I sincerely hope he is better.”

Lucy replied coldly, and informed him that she was on her way to Mrs. Toogood, and had no time to stop.

Had Miss Pinhorn been present, she might possibly have acknowledged that Lucy really could put on a little dignity upon occasion ; but Mr. Cheek was too intent upon other things to perceive it.

“ One moment, Miss Lucy, if I may be so bold. I am likewise on my way to Mrs. Toogood, to inquire for my dear friend, Mr. Bloomer ; but, upon second thoughts, I may intrude upon your visit, and had

rather speak to you here, as I have something to say which may be better without witnesses."

Lucy raised her eyebrows in a style that added more to her beauty than to Mr. Cheek's admiration.

"Upon *second* thoughts," she replied, "I rather wonder it did not occur to you *first*, that it is not *of me* you should inquire about my uncle, or request a conversation without witnesses."

"My dear young lady——"

"Or perhaps you think it better to inform me in private that you went with some cruel men to seize the trifles of a poor woman whose rent had been ten times paid by her hard labour, at your own desire. If this is all you have to say, I know it already; and likewise to whom I am obliged for her protection."

"Miss Lucy, it was a mistake. I vow and declare it was a mistake. Let me entreat you to sit down and hear me explain it!"

"It has been quite enough explained already. If you think otherwise, Mrs. Toogood is just as much concerned as I am. If you have other matters to speak of, as you intimate, it is not my wish to withhold any secrets from her." Here the indignant girl made a step to pass him, but he spread out his arms imploringly:

"I beg you will not judge so hastily! Every one knows how patiently you listen to those who come to you for charity, and it is really a charity that I wish to ask! You can't suppose that, if I had known Mrs. Rokins was a person in whom you took the slightest——"

"That is nothing to the point, Mr. Cheek. She is an object of respect; and, as such, had a claim to justice, independent of other reasons."

"But I assure you the men were hard-hearted brutes, and vastly exceeded their instructions."

"Had that been the case, it was so much the worse to employ them. But I have other accounts which do you as little credit as your present denial. I have heard quite enough; and against such things in future sufficient measures will be taken."

"Goodness, Miss Lucy! there is no need of any measures whatever; for I promise you Mrs. Rokins shall never be asked for any rent again."

"That is a matter for the consideration of your employer, and not to be esteemed an obligation to his servant. Perhaps, too, he may object to her spending her hard earnings in keeping her poor cottage habitable, which, it was understood, was to be done for her."

"And so it shall, poor old lady! I'm sure, if I had known it wanted repair—"

"You were there three times during the last week."

"Was I? I have no recollection of it. I have so much to attend to that it is hard to remember anything. But your recommendation, Miss Lucy—".

"I make no recommendation at all, Mr. Cheek; unless it be a recommendation to remember that you are the hired agent of this property, and not its master."

Mr. Cheek had never entertained a suspicion of

this proud phase of Lucy's character, and almost quailed under it; particularly as it was the precise phase that was most unpropitious to the grand matter in reserve. Any one else would have been discouraged, but Mr. Cheek could not afford to be so. He had screwed up his determination to now or never, and resolutely plunged his foot into a quagmire worse than his own farm-yard.

"Miss Lucy," he protested, "you are angry without a cause, and I cannot let the occasion pass without proving how wholly and devotedly I desire to be your truest friend."

"Sir! I presume you mean servant: my friends are in another sphere."

"Yes; but you must remember that you have not many; and it causes me indescribable pain to know that the few you have must soon become fewer. Be advised, and consider the age and infirmities of Mr. Bloomer, of whom, there is no question, you must be deprived very shortly."

"By your assistance, Mr. Cheek. I have told you I wish to pass on; and, as a civil request is not enough I *desire* you will take your own way and leave me to mine."

"Hey, dey! This is strong!" He exclaimed, with an inadvertent burst of ferocity, which as quickly turned to a burst of expostulation. "My dear young lady, I only wish you to reflect upon what is to become of you when your uncle dies and the living passes into other hands, and the sale of the estate has been effected by the creditors, and I am deprived of the power of ever giving you farther in-

telligence of my dear friend, your excellent father. I have used a word that offends you, but consider how things are changed. Whatever Sir Harry was has long passed away; all he had is in hands it does not satisfy; he is himself hardly driven to keep out of them, whilst I, who have the misfortune to be so looked down upon, am a man of fortune."

"I have no doubt you *now* speak the truth, and it is the first time that ever truth was a disgrace. Boast of your pillage to some one else, and stand away!"

"Now, look you there! Because one person is ruined by extravagance, another cannot prosper without dishonesty! What an answer is that to one who offers all his advantages to your acceptance!"

"How!" Lucy drew herself up like a young Medusa. "What mean you by that?"

"Come, I'm glad you ask me a question, for it shows you more disposed for conversation. I mean exactly what I say; and I think you will allow that you have no need to question how I came by my property when I offer you every farthing of it. I am not, perhaps, what you consider your equal in birth. But notwithstanding that, I hold a respectable position as a man of fortune and a magistrate for the county; whilst you, with all your breeding and beauty—I must speak plainly for your own sake—are entirely destitute. Now don't be in a hurry, for matters cannot be mended by anger—unprotected, without resource, lost in a hard-hearted world—what's to become of you? Look at that house in the distance, with its fine park and its fine woods,

and I don't know what. That's Broome Warren Chase. The house in which you were born, and dearer to you, as I have heard you say, than the whole globe around it. If you will share it with me that place shall be yours."

Lucy's eyes were lightened up with a gleam of inspiration.

"The wretch!" she cried out, not addressing him, but, as it seemed, the Powers above them. "The wretch has betrayed himself! The home of my father is mine already. He holds some secret proof of it, and thinks to secure it under the show of generosity. He dares to insult me because he knows my father is dead! Oh, were he living, and but a moment here!"

"And if he were," said Cheek, with the snarl of a wild beast, routed out of his hiding-place, "and if he were, what then? Would you compel me to the revelations you have such mortal cause to dread? Would you pull them down upon your own head? Rage as you will, you are not so mad as that!"

It was well that Lucy had ventured her midnight conversation with Aaron Daunt! It was well that she had asked him what cause she had to fear Mr. Cheek. His assurance had been a treasured comfort to her, and the time was come to prove it.

"Hark you, Mr. Cheek," she replied, with a look of mysterious daring to which she herself could attach no meaning but such as she might detect in his own scared countenance. "Look back, Mr. Cheek, look back upon some past transactions of your life! It may be that I have other information than you

have thought it safe to give me. That you have been forestalled in your revelations."

Her piercing eye followed the random shaft, and saw it struck the mark. "Be ready, Mr. Cheek, I warn you! Be ready for the test of which of us has most cause to dread the other. You with your fiend's calumnies, or I with your evil spirit, *Aaron Daunt!*"

Cheek looked at her, pale and paralyzed, for some moments; and then his courage partially returned. He felt that, had she known all which he suspected Aaron could tell, she would not have spoken in hints. He was likewise sensible that his worst policy was to seem alarmed. But his daring was damped, as appeared in his less confident tone.

"Be cautious, Miss Lucy; be cautious what you do! I can bear much for your sake; but my reputation, if attacked, must be defended, and you know the means I must resort to."

"Resort to them at once; for here, thank God, is Mrs. Toogood come to meet me!"

He turned round in alarm; and sure enough, there was Mrs. Toogood serenely taking her morning walk, with her footman attending her.

"Be cautious!" he repeated, "not a word of what has passed! Not a syllable of anything, or you bring down the whole upon yourself!"

He could say no more, for Mrs. Toogood had perceived that something was wrong and hastened her steps.

"Why, Lucy," she exclaimed, "my dear Lucy, what on earth——"

“Oh, nothing, ma’am, nothing,” said Cheek, trembling from head to foot, and trying to laugh it off, “only the remembrance of a tale of distress which was once rather harrowing, but has long passed away. I had better tell you another time, for I had no idea it would have affected Miss Longland so strongly.”

“If you please, Mr. Cheek,” replied Lucy, “we will have it now—what think you, Mrs. Toogood? This man, who has been distinguished by your confidence—I might almost say by your friendship—has dared to taunt me with my want of protection! Has presumed to practice on my fears of destitution. Has threatened me with vengeance—I am choked with saying it—if I refuse to marry him.”

“Mr. Cheek!”

“And defied me, with the last words he spoke, to repeat to *you* one syllable.”

Never was worthy lady in greater amazement than Mrs. Toogood.

“Impossible! Mr. Cheek, have you called Miss Longland destitute, when you yourself witnessed the deed by which I gave her ten thousand pounds?”

“Did you do so? Did he know it?”

“Certainly! and knew you were to have it on your marriage.”

“Oh, now I see it all! and yet *not* all! There’s more—much more—behind! My dear, dear Mrs. Toogood, how little you believed what outrage your generosity would lead to! It was to grasp your bounty, and I know not what besides, that I have been degraded by this ruffian’s insolence.”

Mrs. Toogood was lost in wonder.

“Have I, then—have I *myself* been so deceived ? I am thunderstruck ! This, then, was your reason, Mr. Cheek, why my intentions were to be kept secret from all the world, and most of all from Miss Longland !”

The gentleman addressed stood ghastly and grinning, with not a word or a sound but a low chuckle of amusement. At last he burst into a hideous laugh.

“And this is the way,” he cried, “this is the way in which you understand a harmless piece of pleasantry ! Would any human being have dreamt I could be in earnest ? What, I that could buy the best man in the county thrice over, toss my thousands to the feet of a high and mighty miss who could not condescend to thank me ! No, Mrs. Toogood—no, ma’am. Christopher Cheek is too much a man of business for that ! What I did was in *your* interest ; to try how far the young lady was likely to be grateful for your gifts, as judged by her gratitude to *me*. You see what that is. Nothing could have answered better.”

“Nothing, sir, I grant, to prove all human fallibility, and astound me at my late opinion.”

“Of course, Mrs. Toogood, of course. I ought to have expected nothing better than the thanks which people generally get for serving their friends.”

“Rather say, Mr. Cheek, for miraculous imposition upon them. I have hitherto believed what you said of *yourself*, and must now, of course, believe what other people say. It is unnecessary to trouble you

further respecting the subject of my note ; as, no doubt, my nephew, Mr. Crowley, was perfectly justified in his proceedings, which are the same I shall be under the necessity of directing in any visit with which you may think proper to honour the Rosary. Good morning, sir." With which Mrs. Toogood made him a curtsey that might have swept him out of the Bills of Mortality.

But it only swept away the last shelter behind which he had hoped to plan better operations, and brought him into fuller daylight.

"Ha, ha !" he retorted, scarcely knowing what he said. "It is a pleasure to understand Mrs. Toogood at last after trying so many years in vain. Perhaps, as this is a lucid interval, she may now understand Christopher Cheek."

But Christopher Cheek was left to puzzle out that problem by himself, for Mrs. Toogood had taken the arm of Lucy, and was making her stately progress homeward, the footman only looking back, with his brass-headed staff of office prepared for exigencies. Having, therefore, nobody to instruct, Mr. Cheek's solution of himself was not carried out quite so perspicuously as it might have been, and was only notable for such fragmentary eloquence as people will sometimes soliloquise rather than wisdom should want listeners. But as the fragments which, at that moment, fortified Mr. Cheek and frightened the crows, seemed rather like materials for history, we endeavoured to put one or two of them together. Our first conclusion was that he had a natural turn for mathematics, making it an

axiom that one Cheek was equal to any given number of honest folks, and that a line as crooked as a ram's horn could be prolonged to infinity. Our next was that the stumble of to-day was only to be got over by a stride of equal desperation to-morrow ; when, in consequence of having just been canted over by the stepping-stone, he would have a double distance to cover, with a pretty deep gulf to receive him if he made another mistake.

Having exhausted all imaginary demonstrations of rage and resentment, he scowled his way home to exhibit the result of his great undertaking, which Nelly had foreseen the night before, and to call for his breakfast, with the addition of yesterday's dinner and supper. He looked as if it would be dangerous to speak to him, and eat as if he were devouring his enemies. After which he strode stormily about the house, in preparation for a hasty journey, and then thrust his poor pony into the shafts, and flogged him to the railway.

CHAPTER XIX.

WE have seen that, early on the same morning, Crowley had set out upon his promised expedition to young Lord Goldfield; a circumstance which perhaps prevented him from making a second intrusion upon Mr. Cheek before that gentleman had quite cooled from the first.

The journey lay through London, where he arrived in the afternoon, encouraged by a newspaper, purchased on the road, to hope it might not be necessary to go farther. Some very important races, he found, were to commence on the day following, and he knew, from observations on the sporting portion of his club, that their last arrangements for such events were usually made at some celebrated betting rooms which we need not mention. Nothing in creation was of such consequence as the concluding odds on first favourites, or a few ounces in the weights for the Great Handicap; to say nothing of the scratchings, hedgings, and reported trials, with the hints of the knowing, and the names of the celebrated atoms engaged to ride. And yet the Turf, at the time of which we are writing, was but a

rising business compared with the glorious development which has astounded us more recently. One or two fine sheep had been shorn of their golden fleece, and a joint stock company of Jasons had driven them to bleat in some wilderness out of sight of their natural folds; but it was sufficiently rare to cause a nine days' wonder, and some commiseration. We are now less given to surprise, and our sensibilities have been drawn upon so deeply that few people have a fraction remaining. We leave wiser heads to carry out our reflections, if they choose, and hope the gallant young rams are learning to look about them at shearing time.

Crowley made his inquiries at Lord Goldfield's hotel, and found he was in town, but not at home. Concluding where he was, which was where he had not himself the privilege of the entrée, he took up the same quarters to wait for him.

The head of the house of Goldfield continued to enjoy the operation of the clippers till a very late hour, when he returned to sum up his triumphs with all the jauntiness of a French poodle that has nothing superfluous left but the tuft at his tail. The information, however, that a gentleman named Crowley was waiting for him seemed a little embarrassing. Not that he had any want of regard for Crowley, whom, on the contrary, he had always liked better than any other friend he possessed, but his own undecided character was so full of weak traits that, though he was wholly unconscious of them, the higher qualities opposed to him always inspired a sensation of reproach. The thoughts and

pursuits which he could discuss freely with others were too aimless and trifling to find sympathy where he would have been most glad of it, and everything beyond them was an exertion in which he was too unpractised to commit himself when he could avoid it. Hence, the life he had been leading and the scene he had just quitted made him apprehensive of being driven to admissions for which he could expect no approval.

His prepossessing appearance, however, and genuine expression of pleasure, together with a shadowy resemblance to both his father and his mother, would have disarmed any disposition to inflict mortification, even had Crowley been less averse to that ordinary mode of reasoning. They shook hands as they had done in times when sagacity could hardly have been expected in either; and no superiority was allowed to appear, except what could not be disguised, and consisted in two or three years of seniority on the part of Crowley. They were soon talking on more equal terms than ever, for the young lord found his favourite themes taken up with an apparently corresponding interest, and reckoned upon the same sort of credit which gratified him so highly from other quarters. His frankness went over the last three years with a pride that left nothing untold, and in terms of vast enjoyment; though, young as he was, there were even now some contractions about his boyish face, just budding forth a pale moustache.

To account for these vestiges of untimely care, Crowley continued to lead him on with inquiries so

complimentary to his acuteness that the poor lad really began to fancy his friend was picking up instructions to qualify himself for the same line of celebrity. Of course he was highly flattered at being the instructor, instead of the lectured, when the pupil was no less than the sensible adviser of whom he had so long stood in awe, and his career of ambition was a long history, all the more pitiable from its enthusiastic simplicity. Though he stood on the verge of ruin, it had evidently never occurred to him that he had been the victim of sharpers, and was in imminent danger of investing in that company an heirloom of more value than all the rest of his patrimony.

“The truth is,” he continued, “I have been bitten pretty sharply; but the race course, in some sort, resembles the hunting field, where, if a man means to get forward, he must not mind a few ups and downs, and the cautious rider who cranes over his leaps gets more falls than anyone else; or like the field of battle, where we have good authority for saying that victory is the result of a lucky series of accidents. Now you’ll see I shall gain a great one to-morrow, when I stand to win a good many thousands, merely because the handicapper has over-weighted all the best horses. There are but four acceptances, and I have backed Weasel to be first or second, in consequence of a telegram that came this afternoon to tell me that two of them will not start. There’s an accident for you! Only two to run, and all the same to me whether I am first or second. A few more such chances and all my losses will be redeemed!”

Crowley was silent for a moment, for it cost him an effort to suppress his indignation at a profit upon private information, which was neither more nor less than a swindle upon the less enlightened. The heedless young man would, no doubt, have been equally shocked if such a thought had struck him, but thinking was not his forte, though it was not the exact time to remind him of it, and discourage farther communications; and it is difficult to prescribe for a patient before we know all the symptoms of his malady. By the same style of examination adopted by the physician in cases of lunacy, Crowley soon discovered something more than symptoms that the present one was hopeless.

"And how," he enquired, "did you gain all this invaluable knowledge? for it seems impossible to have been acquired by your own self-education. You must have been the pupil of able professors?"

"Oh, there's no end of good fellowship in the Ring, and any promising freshman, as we are called at college, is sure to be taken up by all who can help him. I have a great many friends who can turn a spoon into a razor in no time."

"With the fusion of a little baser metal. But does not a certain quantity of the better ore escape in the grinding?"

"Oh, we must all pay for improvements."

"Of course," replied Crowley, coming now to a question most important to himself. "Did you ever happen to benefit by the assistance of, I dare say, an accomplished grinder, called Captain Cox?"

"Cox! Do you know Cox?"

Crowley almost started at the scarcely expected verification of what he had thought possible.

"I know something of him," he answered, "but have not the advantage of his acquaintance. You are more fortunate, I perceive."

"The best fellow in the world! It was Cox who sent me the telegram to-day, and recommended me to lay it on heavily with two or three fellows who were anxious to bet against Weasel. I have booked them, and no mistake."

"And they, I suspect, with no mistake, have booked you. Now, my dear Harry of Goldfield, mind what I tell you—this Cox is a finished rogue."

"What, Cox! Why he's the best friend I have. Spends half his time with me. Looks after my stud, instructs me how to lay out my money, and finds me as much as I want, in emergencies."

"Indeed! And where does he find it?"

"Oh, I don't know. Of some old Jew, I believe, named Moses Pinhorn. But all in his own name; so you must not think me at all compromised with that set—Cox takes care of that—the most obliging, disinterested,—why, you will hardly believe, he bought me this two years' old, that is going to win me so much to-morrow, for a mere trifle of two thousand, when he might have bought him for himself and sold him for twice as much. I know it to be a fact, because I have it upon the best authority."

"Aye? And what authority is that?"

"Why, he told me so himself!"

"I thought so."

The noble Earl began to resume the embarrassed expression, and Crowley continued.

“ Now do not think me unkind or meddlesome if I make a few frank remarks upon what you have told me, and a few prophecies of what will be the event. In the first place, can you believe that people who live upon the inexperience of others—your spoon grinders—can have any inducement but the dust of the said spoon, or that their good fellowship endures one moment after the spoon is transformed and becomes as sharp as themselves ? That the phoenix of to-day, in other words, will meet with the same worship when he is the jackdaw of tomorrow, unless he learns to be a better thief than his teachers ? No doubt the Turf has many spotless votaries, and as long as they confine themselves to its fair contests we have no right to find fault with them ; but the betting ring is formed from another class—the barnacles that stick to a fine ship, and must, if they are not scraped off, eventually sink it. What distinction can you draw between the cheat who overlooks your cards, and his counterpart who spies into the secrets of your stable ? True, the last rogue enjoys an immunity because he happens to be in fashion, and because his reproach is lost in his partnership with a legion ; but to whom is it lost except to those who share it ? I am grieved that you did not consult your better feelings before you made those bets you speak of, and confess I shall think you more fortunate in losing than in winning them. That you will lose them I have no doubt, or that you have made them with the agents of this best fellow in

the world, Captain Cox ; whose great friendship will not admit of his robbing you more openly."

"Cox!"

"Yes, Cox. Tell him I said so, when he tears his hair at the false information upon which he wrote his telegram. Tell him when he puts in his claim for moneys lent upon more than Shylock's interest ; when the auctioneer's hammer is echoing through the halls of your fathers, and the treasures that are not entailed are offered to the competition of Jew brokers. When the portraits of your noble father and mother are about to be transferred to an exhibition in Wardour Street ; and your cheap bargain of the famous Weasel is sold a little cheaper to the cart of a costermonger. Forgive me if my words are strong, for I am thinking of your fond and troubled mother, whom I left yesterday in a state which, I bless God, was never the state of mine."

"My mother!" exclaimed Lord Goldfield, who was not too reckless to remember what a mother she was. "She is not ill?"

"She is what I hope you will think worse. She is unhappy."

"Good heavens! From what cause?"

"From the cause which you have given her. She says you have estranged yourself, because you have chosen friends unworthy of your high station, and pursuits which have changed your nature—pursuits of which you are already feeling the consequence. I left her in deep grief, and looking forward to nothing less than the ruin and degradation of a house which has been honoured for many centuries ; and

have come to you, at her desire, to remind you that you are her only son and the last hope of your family."

"My dear Crowley," was the confused reply, "I am very sorry—yes—amazingly shocked—indeed I am—that my dear mother should have taken up such erroneous fancies; but mothers, you know, are always conjuring up chimeras which never—that is, very seldom—prove to be anything more than shadows—the merest shadows. It is only because mine is the best of mothers, that I have ever hesitated to tell her everything. You say yourself that you see no harm in racing for amusement; and, upon my life, I never had any other motive! How could I, with a fortune above every want in the world? For mere amusement—that's all! But I need not tell you that, if a man only goes out partridge-shooting, how certain his mother is that, some day or other, he must needs shoot himself. How she never sees an old woman with a faggot on her back, but she is quite sure it is the body of her son with his head blown off. That's the reason—nothing else! And as for Cox, and the rest of my friends, you would like them amazingly, if you only knew them. As for the telegram—you don't understand—I didn't explain. It was only because some wolves have got into our fold, and we had no other means of making them disgorge what they have devoured. That's the true state of the case, and you will do me the greatest favour imaginable if you will only convince my mother of it. If that doesn't satisfy her, I promise you, as soon as I have won the *Leger*,

which is a dead certainty, and will make me as square as a parallelogram, I will sell my stud and cut racing altogether."

"And if you should lose it? What then?"

"Why, then," replied Lord Goldfield—his countenance confessing he would have no choice—"I will cut it all the same: I will, I promise you."

Crowley tried hard to learn the extent of his losses, but this was not possible, for he did not know it himself; and just then a waiter entered to say that two gentlemen had called for my lord, and said there was no time to lose. He also delivered a letter which had been brought by a messenger.

"By George!" said my lord, "I didn't know how late it was. I must wish you good-night!"

"Why, where are you going, at near one o'clock? I thought you meant to sleep here."

"So I thought myself; but these fellows want to be upon the Heath before daylight to see the last gallops, and we have taken a special train."

As he said this, he broke open the letter, which was very short, but seemed vexatious.

"No bad news, I hope," said Crowley; "only to tell you that the two horses have changed their minds, and mean to start, after all."

"No, not so bad as that; but provoking, nevertheless. Cox is called up to town upon particular business, and won't be at the race. I reckoned upon taking the first step to comfort my dear mother, and telling him to make no more bets for me. What the deuce could have brought him up here at such a time?"

“A little disinclination, perhaps, to see your face and hear your remarks when the race is over. But it cannot be helped. I am delighted with your intentions; which, for fear he should know them too late, I shall be only too happy to convey to him myself.”

“No—will you? Upon my life, you will do me a great favour! Here is the address he writes from; but he is sure not to be long there; he is wanted in so many quarters, and is so indispensable everywhere, that he has no fixed residence.”

“Not for his racing establishment?”

“Oh, he has no horses but the one he rides. He has no time for that. His racing establishment is all in his book, and only runs second to the ‘Court Guide.’”

“And neck-and-neck with the ‘Newgate Calendar.’ He bets upon commission?”

“Just so. And, as I have promised, I’ll not give him another. You’ll find him a charming fellow. Mention my name and he’ll do anything for you. Good-night. Pray say everything you can to comfort my mother; and, rely upon it this shall be my last journey to Newmarket.”

“I think it very likely,” was the answer, in foreboding terms; and they took a hasty, but very cordial leave, though it was grave on one side, and nervous and flurried on the other.

It had not been a very encouraging conference to report to Lady Goldfield, but, woeful as the plight of her son appeared to be, there was an indication of something better in his resolutions, if he could

only keep them. To Crowley himself the success had been miraculous, for though he had certainly foreseen some chance of obtaining a few particulars in the history of Captain Cox in a quarter so attractive to such birds of prey, the last thing he could have dreamt of was the honour of his personal acquaintance. How it could be turned to account was a subject of debate amongst all the wits he could summon ; but that it should be so turned he promised himself and Captain Cox too. Whether the worthy beldams who are good enough to spin our destinies might take it into their heads to chequer it with malign threads, after beginning so well, he did not trouble himself to doubt—self-reliance seldom does ; and, when it finds the old ladies disposed to be crotchety, has very often the faculty of twirling the spindle its own way.

CHAPTER XX.

CROWLEY was early the next morning on his road to Captain Cox, whose address was at no great distance from his hotel, so that he had good hopes of arriving before it was time to awaken aristocratic clients with the "latest intelligence." But in coming to the house he could hardly believe it was the residence of Lord Goldfield's estimable friend; for though the upper portion presented a flashy exterior, the basement was fitted up for a public betting office. Was it possible that the conjurations of racing wizards could establish a community between the frequenters of such a place and the highly cultivated exotics of Belgravia? And yet it was traceable from end to end, and not very circuitously.

Truly, thought Crowley, as he passed through a little mob assembled round the entrance, the influence of the turf must be highly satisfactory to politicians who have, time out of mind, reproached the upper ten thousand with standing too much aloof from the lower million. Here are footmen, grooms, and my lady's page, preparing with book

and pencil to stake their wages against the lords who pay them. Here are 'prentice boys, with ventures from their masters' tills, to be replenished by their winnings; here is every variety of fool secure of making a fortune by his wits; every grade of roguery going in for its little-go in the deep study of follow-my-leader, all certain of taking honours, and all fellow-commoners of one unlimited college, of which the heads are distinguished by coronets, and a great many of the tails by decorations from the House of Correction.

Passing through this studious assembly he presented himself before the chair of a professor, a knavish-looking fellow, seated behind a crowded counter, blandly busy in the register of deposits from two or three consequential flunkies.

"I shall be happy to attend to you, sir," he said, "when I have accommodated these gentlemen." And turning to a powdered head and wilderness of whisker, he resumed their consultation over the card of the day. "What say you, sir, to the handicap? A good thing that! Two to one on my lord's colt going a-begging. Suppose we say three to one? A sure win!"

"I don't seem to patronise my lord's stable," demurred whiskers, very sagaciously. "What do you think, Joseph? You are a judge, you are."

"I am," responded that infallible gentleman. "Is that colt a horse or a mare?"

"Suffer me an instant, gentlemen," said Crowley. "I can safely assure you the colt is not a mare. I only wish to know if Captain Cox is here?"

“Captain Cox!” replied knave, turning round more attentively, and with all deference to the superior style of the enquirer. “Yes, sir,—my lord, I should say; Captain Cox is up-stairs, but very busy just now, with Lord Charles and the Markis. Would your lordship please to do anything in the cup or the handicap, till he is disengaged?”

“No, I thank you. I shall see Captain Cox, which I believe is the same thing.”

“Quite, my lord; certainly; and perhaps they may have gone out by the private door. I'll ask his servant, my lord.” And he tingled a bell which brought an imp of a groom boy. The distinguished visitors were gone, and Crowley's card was taken up and immediately answered by a polite message that Captain Cox would be very happy to see him.

He was conducted through a side door into a spacious entrance hall, with a handsome flight of steps to apartments of suitable reception for aristocratic intimates. The Captain was elegantly got up in morning attire, after the manner of the *creme de la creme* which he had the honour of skimming, though there were some exceptions to his successful imitation of high *ton*; such as a strong aroma of cigars, and a plentiful supply of low sporting papers, which, however popular they may be in some lordly circles, are generally reserved for more private edification. There were likewise many choice samples of coloured prints on the walls, gorgeously framed, and representing great events

on the verdant road to ruin, and portraits of skinned rabbits in buckskins and jockey caps, and a variety of noble patrons, better known in Israel than anywhere else.

The Captain himself was no exception to the exceptions, for though he rose from his lounging chair with a condescending urbanity, adopted from some finished model, he was not so far different from Nelly's description and Crowley's own nocturnal observation, but the natural slangy familiarity was traceable in the borrowed phraseology of Lord Charles and the Marquis. Imitations may always be detected in the best copies we have of another art, and everybody knows that what is frankness in one man is very often sheer impudence in another.

"Amazing happy, Mr. Crowley," he began, "to make your acquaintance. I am intimate with a good many members of your club, but I believe this is the first time we have met. Pray sit down, and take a cigar."

"Thank you, I am not a smoker."

"Perhaps you will excuse me, for I can't get on without it. You left town a little while ago, I heard, and as my friends seldom leave it for any reason but one, if I can do anything in the way of accommodation, you have only to command me. No security, you know; we never talk of that, or, if you are thinking of a turn upon the Heath, say the word, and perhaps I can help you."

"Well, Captain Cox, to say the truth I have been thinking a little about it, and have come up to town

on purpose to hear what is going on. It must, no doubt, be a field of very interesting amusement, when our friends think of nothing else, and we all want amusement sometimes. I should not mind trying it for once, with a loose hundred or two, and if I were successful, there would be no objection to risking my winnings; but a mistake at starting would be discouraging."

"Quite right. Secure the first step, and no fear for the next. Here's a dead certainty for to-day."

"So I have heard. On Lord Goldfield's horse for the handicap?"

"No, no, not *on* him, for then the first step would be a stumble. Everybody thought as you do, ten minutes ago, because Goldfield had been laying it on like a mad man. He is a great friend of mine, but green as a young gooseberry. He won't take advice, and so he always goes wrong, and what's worse for *me*, he tells everybody he goes by my direction. I never can convince him that the best horse has no chance against the best judge, and is no more to be trusted than the best army with the worst general. I grieve to say it is all up with him, for he has nothing left to lose, and I really must decline having anything more to do with his speculations."

Crowley was shocked to find things so much worse than he thought, but glad it was not necessary to deliver his message, and alarm the Captain's caution. If he did not think this advisable, he could hardly be found fault with by the rat that

deserts the sinking ship in which he has himself gnawed the leak.

"Well," resumed Cox, "I told you how things had altered ten minutes ago. The reason is this; two horses engaged in the handicap decided not to start, and were reserved for the next race; but their owners have found that by taking Goldfield's bets, they could make it the best venture of the two, and so they both come to the post, and must leave him nowhere. If he wins, I'll pay your loss. Lay your first hundred against him, and I'll send the proceeds wherever you like, and there will be a good omen for the future."

So, thought Crowley, this is the morsel that baits the trap! He had as little doubt that the withdrawal of the two horses—both, of course, belonging to gentlemen of the first character, and intimate friends of Captain Cox—was another trap, set in ambush for the green gooseberry, and would have made the bet to any extent that he might restore the mangled victim that much of his substance; but Cox's business was to propose nothing alarming, and so he booked a rich client against his ruined friend, and then, "to save trouble," he added, "I may as well pay you now, because, as I tell you, the thing is certain. Here it is," and he handed a clean smooth note for a hundred pounds. "That's the way we do business. No receipt or bother of any kind, all upon honour. If I prove a false prophet for the first time, you can send it back, you know. So you needn't hesitate."

This matter being so cleverly settled to the satisfac-

tion of both parties, the fast tongue of the Captain, ridden by a brain that could not hold it, took a gallop through clouds of Olympic dust, that almost blinded himself, for ranging over an endless region of dead certainties, which might be backed either before or *after* the respective events, and turning into a hundred high roads to celebrity, that led anywhere but upward, amongst trainers and jockies who were the most honest fellows in the world to *their orders*—noble friends who were cleaned out (not a bit too soon), splendid studs that were coming to the hammer for nothing at all (to be sold for what they were worth)—ranging so rapidly, he rather lost his reckoning, and, in the end, rewarded Crowley's polite attention by a slight turn in the wrong course, which was just the one laid out for him.

“I shall have a rare thing,” he went on, through the puffs of his cigar, “for the Cambridgeshire, if I can see you a day or two before; but I'm not sure whereabouts you'll find me. I'll write to your club, for I'm a good deal taken up about an estate in the country, in which I am thinking of making a good investment. There are a good many incumbrances, and I've some misgivings about the title.”

“Almost always the case,” observed Crowley, as calmly as he could. “I have experienced many such difficulties in purchases of my own, and if I can help you as you would help me, I shall be only too happy.”

“Oh, I believe I am getting over them. The worst is a plaguy girl, who stands in the way, and might make all sure.”

"Perhaps that may not be so great a difficulty."

"I understand. Well, I'm not a married man yet; but there's no knowing what I may be, for she's confounded handsome, and if everything else fails—I don't know—I've a sharp looker-out down there, and expect a letter at my solicitor's this morning." Here he looked at his watch, and was surprised. "By Jove, you must excuse me! I shall be too late for my appointment," and hastily changing his exquisite dressing-gown for a coat of transcendent fashion, he had only time to repeat his advice about the Cambridgeshire, and promise ten thousand for the outlay of Goldfield's last hundred.

The abrupt close of the visit was a cruel flaw in the wind which had set so fair; but there was something more to be done yet. They descended together to the street, where Cox hailed a passing cab, and, with a very friendly good morning, directed the driver to a particular number in New Boswell Court, Lincoln's Inn.

This was the strangest incident of the morning, for it was the very place to which Crowley himself was going; being the office of a certain Mr. Badger, solicitor of Sir Harry Longland, of whose address he had possessed himself on the night of his walk with Miss Lightfoot, for the purpose of consulting him upon their conversation. It seemed at first a wonderful coincidence, but was, in reality, none at all, excepting the coincidence of time; for nothing was more likely than an application to the family lawyer for information on those subjects on which Cheek had been so mysterious.

A moment's reflection decided him that it would be best to let Cox have his interview without interruption, and not to seek his own till Mr. Badger was in condition to compare notes with him. He determined, therefore, to return to his hotel for the next hour, and employ the first moments of it in writing to Lord Goldfield, whom he might yet be in time to save from some fresh folly.

He found from the waiter that there was an immediate conveyance for his letter, Lord Goldfield's servant being just about to follow his master with the travelling equipments which in the hasty departure had been left behind. The contents of the letter, in which was included the hundred pound note of which Cox had been so liberal, may be guessed, and in less than half an hour the messenger was on his way by express.

As soon as he thought he might venture, he ordered a cab to take him to Mr. Badger's, resolving after that, to pay a visit to Moses Pinhorn, whose name had been casually dropped the night before, to ascertain for Lady Goldfield the amount of her son's debts, and discourage farther accommodation.

CHAPTER XXI.

WE have now to climb a dark and creaking staircase which gives no gleam of an ending, and, therefore, we presume, the most appropriate mode of access to the law.

Wedged in a table, creaking with a legal chaos, and with an incised half moon to admit him, sat a stout old snuff-coloured gentleman; his back against four stories of Japan cases, inscribed, like tombstones, with the names of those whose substance they contained, and his chin upon his crossed hands, in something like the attitude of the Sphinx. Opposite to him sat Captain Cox, reading the letter he had expected, and ruffled much beyond his ordinary impassible expression, for he often broke into brief exclamations against his own want of caution, and the want of honesty in somebody else. When he had finished, he crumpled his news into his pocket, and turning impatiently to Mr. Badger, asked if he knew anything of a fellow named Crowley.

"I cannot say I ever saw him," replied the lawyer, rather dryly, "but I know him to be a

gentleman of the best fellowship in London, or anywhere else."

"Do you know anything of his having taken a house of Miss Longland?"

"Yes; a month ago."

"Then why the deuce did you never tell me?"

"Because it has nothing to do with Broome Warren, and I didn't see how it concerned you."

"By Jove! but it does though, and he knows it. I have just seen him, and he didn't say a word about it."

"That, I suppose, was because he thought as I do."

"I doubt he's a sharp fellow, that Crowley; and I cannot quite tell what he is thinking about; but it was not what he pretended. He knew more than I told him—I'll swear to that—and came for I don't know what."

"What *could* he come for? There's nothing you wish to hide, is there? We are all above board, ain't we?"

"Of course!" and the Captain made a short pause to bite his nails. It might have occurred to him that he had said a little too much about the plaugy girl who stood in the way to a clear title to the estate he had talked of. After he had finished his nails, he pulled out his letter again, and re-read some parts with more satisfaction; asking with an angry laugh, whether Mr. Badger had heard anything of Cheek lately.

"Not since the rents were due; he's always better engaged then."

"I hope he thinks so! You tell me you have bought up all Sir Harry's creditors."

"Not all; but all that have any security upon Broome Warren, and made a good bargain; upon the assurance, remember, that you make yourself sole creditor only for the purpose of preventing a sale of it and for securing it still to the name of the family. Little more than a name, I fear; but one that I have good reason to feel for. I'm glad that you have also, though you have never explained why."

"Oh! that's a long story. How came the creditors not to pay themselves by selling it long ago?"

"Because it was not to be sold during Sir Harry's life, and we have never heard that he is dead. Besides, he was much beloved, and nobody was inclined to be hard upon him."

"Aye, only upon the memory of Uncle Downton! Well, that's *his* concern. And all the claims are now centred in me, as well as all the sums reserved by Cheek for repairs he never made, and a thousand other things which you can prove to be swindles quite as bad."

"All of them."

"Then, by the Lord Harry, he had best take care of himself!"

Here the discussion was interrupted by a clerk with the card of another visitor.

"Odd enough!" said the old gentleman, raising his head like a worthy house-dog that scents mischief. "Here is Cheek himself!"

The Captain was more excited.

“ See him, by all means; but let us hear his business before he knows mine.”

“ Good. Show Mr. Cheek in.”

Mr. Cheek’s eye first fell upon Mr. Badger, to whom he tendered his hand with a smile of confidence, like a man who feels that his business invests him with some importance; but Mr. Badger only poked out his forefinger, a little unwillingly, because he knew Mr. Cheek’s five were always the teeth of a trap.

“ How d’ye do, Mr. Badger; hope I see you well.”

“ Thank ’ee,—same to you.”

“ How are you, Cheek ?” said Cox, in his careless manner, and with a smile of some irony at his friend’s astonishment.

“ What ! Captain Cox ! Why, who’d have thought of seeing *you* here !”

“ Not you, I dare say. What brings you to London ?”

“ Well, it is something that wouldn’t wait; and so I came up by the night train.”

“ Indeed ! Go about it as fast as you like. My affairs will stand by till yours are done; and then I shall have a pleasant talk with you.”

Cheek did not quite like the look of his friend, but as there was no getting rid of him, he could only be delighted:

“ But who’d have thought of your being a client of Mr. Badger !”

“ Aye; very odd, ain’t it.” And he turned to a

bleared window to study the natural history of the spider.

Mr. Cheek twitched up his trousers to raise that part which people usually sit upon, and placed himself in one of the wooden arm-chairs; holding fast by his knees, and squeezing his hat between them, as if he felt he might squeeze more out of that than his head; for, pressing as he had declared his business to be, he hardly knew how to begin it.

"Come with the Midsummer rents, I suppose?" said Mr. Badger, to relieve him. "Michaelmas almost due."

"Why, no," replied Cheek, regretfully, "I can't say I am. It is a hard matter to collect them. The land is bad, and the tenants are worse. Sir Harry is too kind a landlord, and won't let me give them notice to quit. I hope he'll some day see his error."

"Hope so too."

"I'm as great a loser as he is, in proportion to our positions. My per-cent-age, as agent, has dwindled down to a mere nothing."

"Like to give up the agency, perhaps?"

"Why, not exactly that, you see; I've held it for a good many years, and it has become a habit which would be a loss to me."

"Dare say."

"It is very disheartening to lay out so much money in repairs, and to see everything going to rack and ruin as soon as it is done. If you were to

look at the roofs I covered in last year, you wouldn't believe I had put a tile on them."

"Dare say."

"Such tenants give the very neighbourhood a bad name. There's that once pretty little property, called Oakendell, has been dropping to pieces for want of somebody to occupy it."

"Why couldn't you keep that in repair?"

"Quite impossible. You know it is a separate concern from Broome Warren Chase, and not comprised in the settlement with the creditors, so that I could make no deduction for it. If it belonged to me I shouldn't mind laying out what little I can afford. It isn't worth much, and I can get no offer for it, which grieves me sadly, because it is the only provision for Sir Harry's daughter. I dare say you remember he wished me to sell it for her?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I don't see any chance—unless—for I do pity the poor young lady—unless I buy it myself; and that, in fact, is the purpose of my being here to-day."

"Glad to hear it. What says Sir Harry?"

"Oh, he tells me to do what I think best for her."

"Umph. Where is he?"

"Wandering about. He has always the same reason for keeping out of sight."

"He has nothing to fear. The creditors have no desire to meddle with him. He's not dead, is he?"

People say he must have been dead these dozen years."

"I dare say they'd be glad to prove it, for then, you know, they might come upon me for the yearly allowance I was ordered to pay him from the estate."

"Yes—a pretty round sum, by this time. But you are come to buy Oakendell. What do you mean to give? It was valued at fifteen thousand."

"Aye; twenty years ago. It is a dear purchase now at five."

"Well; I know nothing about it, except that I hold the title-deeds. You are Sir Harry's man of confidence. Five thousand, you say?"

"Five thousand is all I have to give. I know I am doing a foolish thing, but I have no heart to see Sir Harry's daughter so badly off, and I feel it a pleasure to make the sacrifice. I have brought the five thousand with me."

"Where is it?"

"Here." And he took a roll of notes from his pocket. "Count them, and see that all's right."

Badger took them with great readiness, and counted them out. After scrutinising every one of them against the light, and taking down the numbers, he drew out a receipt, and regarded Mr. Cheek with a grim approach to a smile.

"Is it all right, Mr. Badger?"

"Notes are all right." There was a slight emphasis on the word "notes," which seemed to imply that something else was all wrong.

"Then I shall take possession to-morrow."

“How can that be? The place is let for a twelve-month.”

Mr. Cheek looked surprised. How did the lawyer know it was let?

“How? Why, I heard it from the farmers, who have all been here to complain that you won’t stop the water through their roofs, though you have stopped the money for it. They say Mr. Crowley has turned out your pigs, and made the house fit for Christians; and, besides that, he has raised the rent a hundred a-year, and paid it in advance.”

“I have never received a shilling!”

“No, but Miss Longland has. Mr. Philpot delivered it into her own hand, and was too happy to help talking about it. Three hundred a year, which is just twice the interest of your offer; and so, I think, you counted on a decent bargain.”

“I don’t care what they have been doing amongst themselves. The place is not let—not a bit of it! Nobody could let it but the agent, or without a written agreement; and I have neither seen nor signed anything of the kind. There’s a person, named Crowley, lately gone into it without my authority, and I mean to turn him out; which, as I have purchased it over his head, I can do as soon as I please. What can he do against the title-deeds?”

“Aye; but you haven’t got them yet; and, as they were entrusted to me by Sir Harry, you can’t expect me to give them up without his order. It won’t take long, you know. You are acquainted with his whereabouts, though nobody else is, and

can write to him now. There's pen and ink before you."

"How do I know he has not moved? It may be months before I get his answer! What's to prevent your giving me the deeds in the meantime?"

"Can't?" And the word was too forcible to dispute.

"Can't!" repeated Cheek. "Why, then, I must write; and, whilst the answer is coming, you must hand me back the five thousand."

"Can't!" said the Sphinx again, more forcibly than before. "I've just made out the accounts against you, in behalf of the creditors."

"Creditors! What do I care for the creditors? I didn't come for them!"

"No, no; we know that. I'll tell you what you came for. You are old soldier enough to know that no agent for a property can buy it of himself and for himself, and came here to invest me with an authority which I have not got, and which you can't give me. You must wait till we hear from Sir Harry. In the meantime, I tell you, I have made out the account for the creditors, and find you have stopped sums against them for repairs you have never made, and defalcations of tenants who have likewise never made them, to the amount of a great many thousands. These notes will go but a small way to cover them; but a little is better than nothing, and so to the creditors they must go."

Cheek looked white with alarm, and could no longer restrain his bluster, which burst out in large drops upon his forehead.

“Why, how’s this? What d’ye mean? Ain’t a man to have what he has paid for, or his money either? Haven’t you got it in your hand, and isn’t this your receipt?”

“Yes, but you haven’t read it yet.”

He read it in dismay. It was a receipt for five thousand pounds, in part payment of a larger sum, due, as before said.

“What!” roared Mr. Cheek, trying to jump up from his arm-chair, which held him fast by the hips, and jumped up with him. “D’ye mean to rob me?” And on went his hat, as the hat of an injured man sometimes does, with a bang on the crown which nearly stove it in. But the lawyer was not at all disturbed; and Captain Cox, who had been amusing himself with a low whistle, whistled louder and louder, with a quaver in the tone, as if he were laughing very merrily.

“Music has charms to soothe a savage breast;” but not always; for it did not seem to have a soothing effect on the breast of his worship, who swore a series of maledictions on the whole world, if he did not bring his case before every court it contained.

“Hope you will, but ‘fraid you won’t,” was the cool comment; “for then, you know, you’d have to give us a great deal more.”

But his Worship declined listening, and rounded off a stupendous period with a resolution to call a meeting of the creditors the next day to denounce Mr. Badger for laying hands on five thousand pounds which they were never meant to receive.

"Yes, they are," was another cool assurance, "and I mean to call you as my witness. Here are all the creditors standing behind you, and you shall see me pay them." With which he held out the bank notes to Captain Cox, who now came forward, and conveyed them to his breeches pocket.

"Thanks, Cheek," he said, "this is just what I want for next settling day. Another instalment as soon as you can, old fellow. Why, what makes you stare? You have not heard, perhaps, that I have bought up all the debts for the pleasure of receiving your future payments. Pleasant, ain't it, amongst friends?"

As Cheek was too much astounded to answer, the Captain took advantage of his stranded position to pour in a good broadside.

"You are on your way, no doubt, to report progress at Broome Warren Vicarage; but, don't fatigue yourself, because I have had reports already. I really am confounded sorry for you, for Mrs. Toogood was a shocking bad friend to lose, and the young one was such a specimen of sugared wormwood that I fear you are not likely to forget the taste. Take a friend's advice before you try it on again, and remember that, though *they* might be ashamed to talk of you, there's no trusting a footman with a long stick. Oh, you *do* remember something about it I see! How is Mrs. Rokins, and how is little Sukey, and how are your ears, and how is all the rest of you? A strongish fellow, that Crowley, isn't he? Buy him up! Turn him out! Send him to kingdom come! Nobody wants a neighbour who shakes him

out of his shoes ! Bless my heart ! you look as if I had garotted you ! Never mind, old fellow ; only see you make haste to pay up, for law-suits are expensive, and I should be sorry to send you to prison. I should, indeed, rascal as you are !”

It is no doubt unpleasant to be found out, and a great aggravation to be laughed at.

“ Rascal,” thundered Mr. Cheek, with another broadside. “ *You* talk of rascals ? You that the thief upon the gibbet would honour too much with his last kick ! Rascal ! a fair reproach for giving rascality so long a tether ! Wait but a little while, and we’ll see which has the best right to call the other a rascal ! Look at him, you Badger ! Make the most of him while you can ! Pluck him before he moults ! Rip out the golden egg before it is laid at another door ! Ha ! bless my heart ! you look as if I had garotted you !”

There certainly was something of that effect produced, but it quickly gave place to the cool bantering of the professor, who had studied roguery in all its branches ; and his answer puzzled the lawyer as much as the previous menace.

“ Another door, old fellow ?” he retorted, “ and whose door is that ? Can you tell me where it is ? and whether you may not have to thank me for providing you with one ; barred, bolted, and studded with spike-heads ? I shouldn’t wonder if I were to do you that good turn before you expect it. I ought to have done it years ago, but when people are well off they are apt to forget their obligations,

and I was under very particular ones to you—hey? Go home and think of that; and bring us your swindlings—every farthing, mind. You had better not forget!"

The altercation went on with not much prospect of a close, and Mr. Badger watched its varied eruptions with a momentary hope of some result more luminous than smoke. But he was disappointed. Both the hot element and the cool confined their mysteries to each other; and the smoke would have been nothing else but for an accidental spark which gave it a partial blaze. At the moment in which it was most wanted, the clerk re-entered with the card of Mr. James Crowley.

"Show him in," said the old gentleman, unheard by the disputants, who were too intent upon their quarrel; and extricating himself from his arm-chair and half-moon, he met him at the door as a welcome substitute for a police-constable.

Crowley would rather have gone away and returned when the battle was over, but saw he might be wanted, only requesting that the clerk might turn to his Directory for the address of Mr. Moses Pinhorn. Moses Pinhorn! the enquiry seemed odd from such a visitor; but the clerk, who had gone to his own quarter, was ordered aloud to find Mr. Crowley the address of Moses Pinhorn.

Astonishing! That name was a charm that lulled the storm in an instant, and when Crowley entered the room the only sign of collision was that both gentlemen were taken very much a-back. It was

evident that neither of them was prepared or proof against the heavy hand of the Jew. The best protection, however, against many sorts of peril is not to appear conscious of them ; and so Cheek wiped his head, as usual, with his red cotton hand-kerchief, and Cox was charmed with the surprise of meeting his new friend again, and hearing what near neighbours they would be in the country. The most agreeable surprise that ever was !

But as conversations between parties who know too much of each other are somewhat barren of materials, the Captain soon recollected another pressing appointment for himself and his friend Cheek. There is nothing like a community of danger to make people friends ! Throw the two greatest enemies you know, cheek by jowl, into a horse-pond, and they hug one another to the death. After a few more civilities in the vein of those prophets who give you "the tip" to fortune for the inclosure of twelve stamps, he took another familiar leave, accompanied—without that ceremony—by the friend for whom he had engaged to find a door, bolted and barred and studded with spike-heads. Their appointment, however, was at no greater distance than down stairs to the court-yard, where they had another bout of their quarrel and vanished at the opposite ends.

Crowley now disburthened himself of his long story, which embraced every particular that in any way concerned Lucy from the commencement of our history ; in return for which he received an account,

quite as minute, of all that was known to Mr. Badger; and then came their conclusions, which we may make more brief and free from repetition by dropping the dialogue. Here were two semi-transparent sinners who possessed, or thought they possessed, a knowledge of some great claims on the part of Lucy, of which it was impossible to conjecture the nature, though there was great reason to suppose it known to Moses Pinhorn. And who was Moses? Another, and a more impervious sinner. Mr. Badger knew a great deal about him, but had no personal acquaintance, and represented him as the mildest, meekest, and most wily of that tribe who live on the best blood of the heedless. He also remembered something more to the present point; for, in past times, when he was professionally employed for Sir Harry, he had heard that Moses was solicitor to the late Mr. Downton, and also his intimate friend; which made it very probable that he afterwards became the intimate of Downton's nephew and successor, Captain Cox, which, indeed, had been made apparent by their joint good offices for Lord Goldfield. More than this, he knew that Cheek, in the time of Sir Harry's troubles, had often been sent to negotiate with Mr. Pinhorn, and thought it likely that, being a kindred spirit, he might have established an understanding which still continued. Thus it might be that whatever help was hidden in Moses might require a deep sea line and a strong grapple to be dragg'd out of him.

“Leave him to me, Mr. Crowley. Don’t you go near him; for whilst we are talking he is being prepared to receive you. Aaron Daunt, the servant of Downton, and so hardly used by Cox, is much more to our purpose. He has promised, you say, to go back to Broome Warren, and with him there is no knowing what you may not do. He has something very strange to say, and so it seems has Miss Longland. Learn what you can, and let me hear it. You shall also hear what I do with Moses; but it will not be very soon.

“For Lord Goldfield, he must not pay a farthing of his debts till we look into them. I doubt if Moses will dare the exposure of a law-suit. If he does, his character appears against him; if he does not, he proclaims it himself; and upon the horns of this dilemma he may choose to maintain his probity by tossing his two friends. It is well that the young lord and the young lady are in the toils of the same hands, for the same effort may cut the meshes for both. Lawyers might think us too ready to build upon shadows, but as we have nothing better to build on, we must lay our plans upon these. At all events, shadows will be better comfort for Lady Goldfield than none at all, and I hope she will bear up till we have something more substantial.”

The old gentleman had taken up his case with so much earnest intelligence that Crowley had little left to say, and felt relieved of much of the pain with which he had been about to return home.

His expedition, he was sanguine enough to believe, had at least been productive of good promise; and having prolonged his consultation to the last minute he could afford with a chance of seeing Goldsworthy that night, he took his leave.

CHAPTER XXII.

IT was night before Mr. Cheek returned home, and here it was not his fortune to find anything very tranquillizing.

In the course of the morning, Nelly's little brother, Tom Dabchick, had run in with loud complaints of his treatment at the hands of Mrs. Bloomer, who had missed Jim Crow, and made his ears responsible. She had likewise levied upon him the heavy fine of his breakfast. Such an appeal to the independent temper of Nelly from the only object that reconciled her to her poor miserable life was enough to enrage her the most of the two, considering how long her own provocations had put her patience to a dangerous test. Her first impulse was to rush out, and pay a return visit to the ears of Mrs. Bloomer; but as the greatest portion of Tom's affliction was hunger, she postponed that act of etiquette to set him down in Mr. Cheek's arm-chair before the leavings of yesterday's triple breakfast. In disposing of this, the young gentleman soon mixed up his wrath with his eggs and bacon, and swallowed all together; and by the time he had left

nothing to remove but the luggage thus carefully packed up, Nelly had found leisure to resolve on proceedings more pacific. She had given Mr. Cheek a sort of notice that, as soon as the blackberries were ripe, she had thoughts of changing her situation, and had likewise expressed her disapproval of little brother Tom's ; and here was a good occasion for taking leave without its painful ceremony.

“ Well, Tommy,” she said, “ I've been thinking what we had best do, and I'll tell you what it is. We were never so happy as when we wandered about the forest, and this is just the time of year to go wandering again.”

“ No ! will you though ?” replied the boy, brightening with joy. “ But when ?”

“ Now, Tommy.”

“ What, to-day ?”

“ Yes, as soon as I have packed up.”

“ Hooray ! No more of Mother Bloomer, then ! And I hope the next chap she leathers will give her as good as she brings. Now we shall hunt the squirrels again, and grope out the rabbits, and light our fire under the old oak tree, and be sung to sleep by the howlets and wild cats, just as we used to be.”

Nelly was sufficiently satisfied with her experience of civilization to brave the wilderness with the same spirit, and the rags she had patched up in her few spare moments, were bundled up in a few more.

“ Why, where be ye going ?” enquired deaf old Nanny, with the voice of a grasshopper.

“Away, Nanny.”

“Away ! Where to ?”

“To the kites and crows.”

“To fight the crows ?”

“Aye, Nanny.”

“And when be ye coming back ?”

“When yesterday comes back. I’m going away for good ; and I advise you to go home to the work-house for better.”

“Lawk ! What shall I tell master ?”

Nelly thought of the Sunday morning, when Aaron had taken such short leave. She had thought of it often, for he had said with a peculiar and strongly expressive look that he was going to Dover, from whence Mr. Cheek might chance to hear of him.

“Tell him,” she said, “he need not trouble himself to look for me to pay what he owes for the last two years. I leave it all to you, and if you don’t get it, I must send somebody *from Dover*.”

This was about as much as could be trusted to Nanny’s memory, and perhaps more ; but there was something of greater moment for Cheek’s information, and this was Nelly’s discovery of Mr. Fozzard’s understanding with Captain Cox, which she had so often been prevented from telling him, and which his recent turmoils had driven out of his head. It was most essential that he should know it, and she could not write ; neither could she communicate the omission to Polly Lightfoot, at that hour, without alarming the curiosity of Miss Pen. Nanny’s memory therefore was the only resource ;

and that it might not break down, the burthen was duly proportioned to its powers.

“Nanny, will you promise to remember two or three words without fail?”

“Yes, sure.”

“Well, then, as soon as Mr. Cheek comes home, tell him this—Nelly begged me to say she had found out that Captain Cox’s secret friend is Mr. Fozzard. Will you be sure to do it?”

“Ey, ey.”

“You won’t forget?”

“Na—sartin!”

“Now mind—Captain Cox’s secret friend is Mr. Fozzard. And so God bless you, Nanny. Come along, Tommy.”

And while the poor old creature was gaping with another question, they were off upon their travels.

Their first stage was not a long one, for they halted near the spot where Cheek had watched for Lucy; and here they sat down to consider what line they should take. They knew the forest as well as the animals bred in it: where to find the chestnut trees and the pure spring: where the old haunts in which they had minded father’s contraband stores, and the gipsy lived more merry than his friend the justice.

“We shall never want a living, Tommy, whilst I can make baskets and you can make traps. It is only those who depend on others that can’t get on. We see how God feeds the dumb things about us, but we never see them feed one another when they are old enough to pick up what He gives them;

and if they won't pick it up, it is their own fault if they die."

"That's just it, sister Nell," replied her sharp disciple. "We don't ought to trust to anybody but ourselves, for whenever our chaps offered to take my nestes for me, before I could climb for myself, they alleys sucked the eggs before they brought 'em down. But I know better now. Only wait till I grab a handful of hair from that old horse's tail, and a few sticks from that withy tree, and we'll have a jolly roast of blackbirds for dinner."

Nelly looked lovingly after him till he had scampered out of sight, and was turning more gravely round to muse on the feasibility of her own lesson, when she was startled by the apparition of Aaron Daunt.

We have just reminded the reader that Aaron left Cheek's abode on a Sunday morning, but it was long after that punctual attendant upon divine service had gone to church. The interval had passed in quiet conversation with Nelly, who soon found the idea she had formed from overhearing the few words with the Vicar, and a few more with Lucy, very much confirmed. Her feeling was that Aaron was not always the savage he appeared to be, but a man of quick and strong impulses, occasionally worked up to ferocity by characters and circumstances, which might have caused the same effect on very many people. He had told her his history and heard her own,—both as miserable as they well could be—and they had parted with mutual compassion and good-will. They were,

therefore, neither of them displeased at this accidental meeting.

“Nelly,” said Aaron, kindly, “it was just you that I was thinking about, and wishing very much to see.”

“Indeed, Mr. Aaron, I am glad you have found me, for in another minute you would have been too late. I hope you have been fortunate in that business which you said you mustn’t talk of.”

“Yes, Nelly, very much so, but not entirely. Is Mr. Bloomer still living?”

“Yes, and much better.”

“And is Miss Longland well?”

“I hear so.”

“I have come back to see her about a commission she gave me.”

“I’m afraid you will find it difficult, for it must needs be a private one, or it would not have been given so secretly. She is not likely to come out for fear of meeting Mr. Cheek, and you cannot see her at home without interruption from Mrs. Bloomer.”

“Perhaps you can give a message.”

“That is more difficult still. Mrs. Bloomer and I have had a terrible quarrel. You must wait two or three days, and then there will be no trouble, for Mr. Bloomer and Miss Lucy are going on a visit to Oakendell—about an hour’s walk from here.”

“I’m glad to hear it. I’m not pressed for a day or two.”

“You will go, I suppose, to Mr. Cheek?”

“No; I have nothing more to say to him *at*

present, and I should be glad if *you* had not, though I cannot tell you why."

"There is no need to give me a reason, for I have plenty, and have left him already."

"You couldn't have done better, my poor girl; but where are you going?"

"Nowhere in particular. To live amongst the wild things in the forest."

"By yourself?"

"With my little brother that I told you of, till I can find father."

"Can I help you? I have nothing to do till I can see Miss Longland, and I don't want to be seen myself. Your father, you say, is the captain of a crew of smugglers, and spends his life upon the sea, between the nearest coast to this place and the French one. Has he no home on shore?"

"None that I know of, except the county jail, where I hear he often passes two or three months."

"Jail?" repeated Aaron, with bitter recollections.

"Yes, Mr. Aaron. I ask your pardon for naming such a place; but, in father's case, I am forced to believe it is no such bad one, for whilst he is there he is prevented from drinking, and doing much that might, by-and-bye, send him to a worse one."

"Don't take on, poor Nelly. He must have a home somewhere. Whereabouts on the coast is he most likely to be met with?"

"It used to be at a small fishing town, more than fifty miles from here, called Sea Cliff; but I don't know now."

"And you never hear from him?"

"I've never heard since I have been here, or I should long ago have found my way to him."

"Fifty miles is but a short walk, Nelly, and, if it will be a comfort to you, I'll go and look for him."

"Will you, Mr. Aaron? May God forgive me for ever thinking wrong of you!"

"I find no fault with you, for who can think well of anybody who comes to see Cheek? You could not tell what brought me, but depend upon it I came with no friendly motive, nor do I feel much in his debt for my entertainment, which he dared not refuse me. Only tell me what I shall say to your father, and where I shall find you when I come back, and I will set off this minute."

Nelly's thanks were spoken in a passion of tears, for, except from Lucy and Mary Lightfoot, these were the first humane words, and this was the first service that had ever called for her gratitude, and they were the more touching for coming from a fellow sufferer, who was more than herself in want of them.

"I will show you, Mr. Aaron," she at length said, "the place we have chosen for our shelter, for it is directly in your way, and not more than a mile or two from where we stand. I was only waiting for Tommy, and here he comes."

The homeless party then left the public road, and made their way through the forest with the instinct of fur and feather, whilst Nelly made the way interesting by relating the new claims of Messrs.

Cox and Cheek to special attention. They were soon at their wild hiding-place, which will be more in need of description by-and-bye; and here Aaron left them to find existence where their so called betters would have starved.

We return to the less poetical seclusion of Green Lane's End, where Mr. Cheek arrived long after dark, tired, angry, hungry, and by no means disposed to patience under farther provocation. His return was signified by three thwacks at the door with his heavy blackthorn, which might have smashed the three heads of Messrs. Badger, Cox, and Crowley. Not being answered in the same number of seconds, they were followed up by half a dozen more, and these again by exertions more continuous, with uproarious vocal additions, and a chorus of village dogs. It was some time before the garrison surrendered, in the person of Mrs. Nanny Tuck, who, besides being deaf, had gone to sleep with her head, as usual, up the chimney. When she unlocked and unbarred the portal, she had no light, and Mr. Cheek relieved his heart of a storm of curses on the inattentive Nelly.

“It ain’t no use,” said the shrill old creature, “to curse Nelly, because she’s gone away.”

“Gone? Where’s she gone to?”

“Eh? How should I know? She’s took Tom Dabchick, and ain’t coming back no more.”

The news was startling; for Cheek had always been uneasy about Nelly’s sharp powers of observation.

“Gone! She has nobody to go to!”

“Ees she has. I went after to bring her back, and seed her go away with the gentleman as came to supper one Saturday night, and went away next morning.”

“Aaron Daunt?”

“Ey—that’s what yer honour called him.”

If his honour was stunned before, this did not seem the best means of bringing him round; and the next shock was worse, for Nanny’s recollection improved as she wakened.

“Eh? Stop a bit! Ey, ey. Now I remember. She said she was going to some place called Dover. That was the name. She told me particular not to forget.”

Cheek looked as if she had shot him with her forefinger; and, as Nelly had feared, frightened all the rest of the message out of her head. After standing in that position some moments, he asked, with bated energy, why she did not bring a candle?

“Candle? Ey, ey,—as soon as I can find the tinder-box.”

“Have you got no fire?”

“Fire? Lauk, it went out whilst I was asleep.”

“Have you no hot water?”

“Lauk, I’m afraid not?”

“Nor dinner?”

“Dinner, yer honour? I thought ye’d dine out!”

Poor Mr. Cheek—what a day of trials! Pillaged of five thousand pounds, defied by the friend he had reckoned upon cheating, haunted by evil apprehensions, no grog to keep up his spirits, no fire to dispel his clammy chill, no dinner to restore his inward

man, and no consolation but a squeaky old crone of the workhouse ! If he was a little discontented and hasty under these accumulated griefs, it was a duty, as Mrs. Toogood might have said, to make great allowance !

But, in course of time, the tinder-box was found, the fire lighted, and the demons of darkness were driven about their business. Mr. Cheek's inward man derived much advantage from the comforts to which a good fire is generally preparative ; and, before very long, he found himself in a state of mind to review the incidents of the day.

He was gifted with great powers of resource, and had wonderful determination and energy. He had, moreover, courage to encounter any risk, so long as it involved no personal consequences ; which remark we are only led to make by the dignity with which he turned his back upon them in the Battle of the Wash-Tubs. In short, he had qualities far beyond the petty-larceny ones we have hitherto witnessed, and would have made an excellent lawyer or politician, supposing him possessed of the requisite foresight and depth of calculation, of which our opportunities of judging have not been enough to convince us.

But there was one trait in his character which predominated over all others ; and this was the vindictive one. Whenever it was at all disturbed it interrupted every other thought ; and the betrayal of his recent goings on, to Captain Cox, disturbed it beyond endurance. Who was his enemy ? Who was to be immolated ? Why had he forgotten to

question Nelly ? Why had she not reminded him ? It was some one near, for he must have written about the scene with Lucy and Mrs. Toogood the moment it occurred. Somebody in his power, and somebody who should feel it. But who ? If Nelly had found out she would, likely enough, have talked about it to old Nanny ; but Nanny was deaf and crazy ; yet no chance was to be lost. He shouted till the house shook, and Nanny seemed to feel the vibration, for she made her appearance, and asked if his honour called.

“ Come here—bring your ears closer—I think you have forgotten something.”

“ Ey ; so do I.”

“ Brush up, then, and tell me what it is.”

“ Eye ; but telle I’ve forgot.”

“ Was it anything that Nelly said ?”

“ Ey, sure ; so it was.”

“ Who was it about ?”

“ Who ? There it is ! if yer Honour could only think of his name——”

“ Was it Cox ?”

“ Cox ? That’s it ! Now I remember ! Cox and Fozzard.”

“ Fozzard ?”

“ E’es sure, that’s he ! and summit about secrets and friends.”

“ That Fozzard was Cox’s secret friend ?”

“ That’s it ! I wasn’t to forget, on no account !”

“ Do you remember any more ?”

“ Na.”

“ Then get along with you.”

“Ey, wish your Honour good night.” And she left his Honour to enjoy his success. He could hardly believe in it. Woe to Mr. Fozzard! But it was important to be quite sure. It was not impossible that his own words might have set Nanny dreaming; and half dreaming himself, after his overpowering fatigue of mind and body, he went off to bed in a sort of waking nightmare.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HE appeared in the morning with no want of self-reliance, and with the hopeful look of one who, having a great deal to do, has arrived at the sometimes difficult decision of where to begin. It may be thought that this beginning was rather a small one, but we cannot grow an oak without planting an acorn ; and so his first scheme was a visit to Miss Pen, though she might have seemed the last person to assist him. The affairs of the donkey, with certain matrimonial rumours, were, of course, no secret to him ; but he had been too busy to present his congratulations, and now they might fetch their value. He did not expect to profit by her sagacity ; for, had she been gifted in that respect, it would only have stood in his way ; but her happy want of it afforded him all the advantages of a thief in the dark.

Before we introduce him at the cottage, we must show how cleverly Polly had prepared her way, and opened a broad field of action, to which he was conducted by an unforseen turn in the interview.

Polly, on the morning after the donkey event, and the walk with Crowley, followed by the last dis-

coveries of Nelly, had boldly acquainted Miss Pen that Neddy Fozzard was no better than she should be, and a great deal worse ; and implored her to give him his mittimus. This she had accompanied with a declaration that she would never again act as their chaperon, never countenance the horror by appearing when he showed his detestable face, and never recognize him with a look that was not lightning.

Here was a mutiny in the heretofore patient and complying Polly ! Never since the fall of Jerusalem had Hebrew lady tossed her raven ringlets with such amazement as was manifest in the daughter of Sir Abraham Pinhorn !

“ Never countenance Mr. Fozzard ! Have you lost your senses ? Never countenance *him* ! ”

“ No, Pen, never ! You shall never say I have helped in your hideous delusion. I am not at liberty to say all that I know or how I know it ; but of this I warn you—Neddy Fozzard is a vile impostor, a double-dealing cheat, and a shame to the dirt he treads on ! ”

“ Mary, is it come to this ? Has jealousy of Mr. Fozzard’s attention to *me* so distorted your understanding, so perverted your principles, that you seek to gratify your malice by accusations of which you confess you have no proof ? ”

“ I have proof, and proof enough to smother him, if I chose to give it ; but you have had proofs enough yourself if you chose to see them. For what purpose do you suppose the low-bred vulgarian has delayed his condescending proposals, all the —————— he has forced himself upon us ? For wh—————

pose has he made such constant and such feeling enquiries into all that concerns you? For what purpose but to assure himself that you have money enough to make a good speculation!"

Pen screamed outright!

"What! Tell me that Mr. Fozzard has no view but money! He that has estates all over the kingdom! I that am the daughter of Sir Abraham Pinhorn, and can reckon back to the first chapter of the Book of Kings! Taunt me with the base insinuation that I have no claims to attention but a few contemptible thousands!"

"Hush, Pen, for heaven's sake! Let him believe the money is all mine, and then we shall be better judges of his projects."

"And is it *so* that you hope to obtain him for yourself? Most delightful! Most transparent!"

"Tell him as much, I beseech you; and that, the moment I am blest with such a treasure, I shall most willingly suffer death for poisoning him! But do ask yourself why he did not come in with you last night to take his dozen cups of tea, and why he has made no civil enquiry this morning. Why, but because he is afraid of committing himself too far before he is better informed?"

Polly here touched upon a soreish place; which, however, as in another branch of the creation, only caused Pen to caracole with more vigour.

"Why did he not come in to tea, and why has he made no enquiries? Why, but because of the reception you always give him? Who could be blind to such rudeness, and what person of Mr. Fozzard's sensitive nature could put up with it? Most cruel and most

unnatural? First, to expose me as you did last night, to the talk of all the country, and then to stand in the way of the only reparation!"

Here the lorn sacrifice dissolved into pathos.

"What if your conduct has finally discouraged him? What then is to become of your hapless sister? Men of Mr. Fozzard's position are not like Mr. Philpot! They have other things to think of than their feelings, and are only awakened to them by such accidents as occurred last night, and may never, never occur again!"

"For goodness sake, my dear Pen, don't be so despairing. Give Neddy the second an additional feed of corn, as I told you, and put Neddy the first on his back, and I'll answer for it you may afford all the delicate attentions you received in less than half a minute."

But Polly's indignation was soon over, and when Pen's upbraidings had worn out two more days, and herself too, and Mr. Fozzard was still an absentee, she began to pity the exhausted sufferer, and tried to comfort her.

"I think," she said, "this matter cannot be too soon brought to a close, and see that if it is left to Mr. Fozzard it will bubble on for ever, and never be boiled out. Why not engage some friend to ask him what he means? Here is old Kit Cheek—if Mrs. Toogood and Lucy and Mr. Crowley have not demolished him—will be charmed to ask him who he is, and where he comes from, and what he has got, and what he wants, and all that; and if he does not satisfy *Kit*, let *Kit* satisfy *him*, that we mean to

be 'better strangers,' and then, you know, we can live together just according to your own notions of what is proper."

Though Pen was in fits at this counsel, it was exactly what she wished, and therefore she thought it a good occasion to display an example of sisterly affection by telling Polly to dispose of her just as she pleased.

It was the fifth disconsolate morning after the loves of the donkeys, and when Cheek's misdemeanours and misadventures had made the circuit of the parish, that he was seen to approach the cottage gate, and as Pen believed nothing to his disadvantage, and Polly nothing to his credit, the one ran away, whilst the other got herself up to receive him.

"Ah, Miss Pennylopy!" he exclaimed, "I have come to make my complaints. Going to be married, and let an old friend like me wait all this while for the announcement! Why, Miss Lopy, Miss Lopy!"

The delicate Miss Lopy held out her trembling hand, but could not speak or look at him.

"Why, Miss Lopy, how is this? I expected to find you in high spirits, and blushing like the rose, but here you are drooping like a broken lily! Come, come, this is too bad! I know you are happy enough in your heart, and you must make me so too, by telling me all about it, for who can feel such an interest as your oldest friend?"

"Nobody, Mr. Cheek," she faltered, "and I should have sent to you, but—"

"But what, Miss Lopy?"

“ I—I had—no—nothing to tell you.”

“ Nothing to tell me, and going to be married !”

Miss Pen put her handkerchief to her eyes, and signified in the same agitated manner that she—believed—there was—some mistake.

“ Mistake !”

“ Ye—yes.”

“ What, don’t you know whether you are going to be married or not ?”

“ N—no !”

“ That’s very odd. Has Mr. Fozzard never asked you ?”

“ I’m—not sure.”

With much distressing effort she got a little farther, and gradually explained how matters stood, and that sister Mary had thought some friend should dispel Mr. Fozzard’s diffident reserve, and make some kind enquiries, suggesting that Mr. Cheek might perhaps be so very good.

“ Enquiries ! To be sure I will !”

“ Oh, Mr. Cheek !”

“ Only let me know a little more of him first. Only tell me, Miss Lopy, what *you* know about him.”

Miss Lopy signified, rather than said, “ Not very much.”

“ Well, but *how* much ?”

Pen’s virgin lips shaped themselves into the expression of “ Nothing !”

“ Um ! That certainly ain’t much.”

“ He is a—gentleman of—great abilities.”

“ That’s a matter for *your* consideration ; but, for

my own part, I should rather hear he was a gentleman of great fortune."

"I—believe—he is."

"And what reason have you to believe so, Miss Lopy?"

"I—don't know."

"What is he doing in Broome Warren?"

"He—walks about."

"Nothing else? Come, you mustn't be so shy with an old friend. He must walk about on some business or other."

Pen gained a little more courage. She believed he had immense landed property, and was very fond of visiting the farmers to learn their new modes of cultivation.

"The farmers!" repeated Mr. Cheek, with a mental memorandum. "And what has he learnt from them?"

She did not know; but, she believed, a great deal, because he was constantly writing letters, which she supposed were to other people of great property.

"I should like my friend, Cox, to profit by such good advice. Two such eminent men ought to be acquainted."

Pen looked surprised, and recovered her presence of mind a little more.

"Cox, did you say? That is singular! Mr. Fozzard wrote a letter here, not long ago, and I accidentally saw the address was to a Captain Cox."

"Was it indeed! I am delighted to hear it—delighted!"

"Yes, Mr. Cheek, because as Captain Cox is a friend of yours you can obtain all the information I am unable to give you."

"Never fear, Miss Lopy; we've got him now."

"Have we indeed! But you cannot be sure!"

"But I *am* sure, and you may take your oath of it!"

What a transport to see her oldest friend so positive. It made her almost herself.

"Good-bye, Miss Lopy; I must catch him before he goes out walking again."

But Pen could not part with her kind friend yet. She was so agitated, so ignorant of such matters. She had never thought of them in her life. Of course not. Dear Mr. Cheek must instruct her in everything. She could only suppose. She supposed his first step would be to inquire Edward's intentions. If he should say he had none, she could not suppose he would talk of ulterior proceedings or hint at breaches of promise, it would be so shocking, and, as she had said, she was not sure. She was so inexperienced, so very, she did not know what she was saying. She supposed, if he proved sincere, the next thing would be the odious discussion of settlements; of which, thank Heaven, she had not the remotest notion. She only supposed it, and then the repulsive conditions of securing her own fortune to her sole and separate use, just as if she could mistrust such a man as Mr. Fozzard. Monstrous!

"Well done, Miss Lopy! For a young lady who has never thought of such things your suppositions

are surprising. But I must not delay, or he'll be off at his walks."

And Mr. Cheek rose and Miss Pen rose, with one hand trembling on the back of her chair and the other still detaining him.

"You are so good, Mr. Cheek; so considerate to think of all this. I suppose there can be nothing else?"

"No, Miss Lopy. I think that's about enough, and so keep up your spirits, and depend upon it I will give a good account of him."

"Good-bye, Mr. Cheek. I suppose it will not be necessary to remind him of pin money, or those revolting provisions for discrepancies of taste. I could never survive them. People are so horribly worldly; a world of which I am thankful to say I don't know the meaning."

"No, Miss Lopy, no. I see you don't, you are all simplicity, all——" something which she could not catch as he made his way out of the door, but it sounded like "sucking dove." If she had heard the rest, after the door closed, she might have thought it bore an equal resemblance to Screws and Harpies.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE retirement in which Mr. Fozzard philosophized was, as we have stated, over the shop of Mr. Choke, the apothecary, druggist, and chemist, with a slight dash of the grocer, selected perhaps for its aromatic savours of tea and tobacco, poor man's plasters, castor oil, and peppermint water; all very suggestive of the climes over which the poet's eye is said to roll in such a fine frenzy. It was not very large, but a person of ordinary longitude might have taken three or four steps, corner wise, without walking through the wall. In the middle of this nut shell was the kernel, or perhaps, as it was a living thing, we ought to say the grub, with an inky stump in his fingers and a blotted proof sheet before him, hunting for a new idea, and about to have a blank day—a metaphor of the conglomerate order, warranted genuine, from the land of poesy which produced the crocodile with his hand in his breeches pocket.

— “I hope I don't rob the world of a good thought,” said Pen's ambassador, introduced by the 'prentice boy.

“Don’t mention it, Mr. Cheek,” responded Mr. Fozzard, with urbane pomposity. “Don’t mention it, sir; all my thoughts are public property. I live for the public.”

“And, no doubt, the public live for you.”

“Ha! well! give and take, Mr. Cheek, give and take. Pray be seated, sir. I consider it to be every man’s duty to benefit the age in which he lives.”

“Very true, Mr. Fozzard! We must pull up our shirt sleeves and pump away; and, by all accounts, your sucker will never be dry.”

“Ha! ha! Not a bad figure of speech! I beg pardon, I have a sudden thought,” and he took a dip of his stump and made a note.

“Well, sir,” he resumed, “it must be a toilsome duty, I admit, for those whose efforts are not appreciated, very; and there are a great many stragglers, as you country gentlemen would say, who follow fame upon a cold scent, and tail off—ha! ha! tail off in the distance.”

“Very true, sir; very true. It ain’t everybody that goes the pace you do. And that reminds me that I shall tail off with the rest, if I don’t cut in. I have called upon a delicate matter relating to Miss Lopy Pinhorn.”

“Hah! a charming young lady, full of talent and accomplishment.”

“Up to the brim; or else she could not have been so sensible of yours. Well, it is about this engagement that has been so long talked of.”

Mr. Fozzard was at a loss to know what engage-

ment was alluded to. Upon his word he was ashamed to say he had forgotten. Was it to dinner or to tea? But Cheek soon apprised him that evasions would not answer; though when he was made to comprehend the nature of the engagement, upon his word he now heard of it for the first time. There might—hah, yes, there might be such a one looming in the future; but such engagements depended a little upon circumstances. And then he descended a trifle to the world beneath the clouds, to hear what circumstances were coming.

“I am aware, Mr. Fozzard, that they do depend on circumstances, and the first circumstance is—you’ll excuse me for our want of information in these remote parts—she tells me she doesn’t know who you are.”

“Ho, ha! Not know who I am! Well, it certainly is far in the country. But, hah, it is not for me to speak of myself. I leave the world to do that for me; and you must pardon me if I refer you to that—a—rather extended field of information.”

“You are fortunate in having so many godfathers and godmothers to answer for you; but the most important question—you’ll excuse me, for I speak under instructions, and believe business is always best done in fewest words—the most important question is not who you are, but what you have got?”

Mr. Fozzard again guffawed—“What I have got! Ho—ho—ho; upon my word I—aw—have not the smallest idea. But, of course, with my position, it

is—a—just what I please. Such matters have very little of my consideration; but if it is customary, in the everyday course of common life, I suppose I must so far conform to that custom as to enquire—though I hardly know how to descend to such trifles—something about these things on the other side."

"Quite according to rule, sir. Miss Lopez has a very pretty fortune of fifteen thousand pounds."

Mr. Fozzard made an approving bow.

"Which she desires to have settled for her sole and separate use, during life, and subject to her last will and testament."

Mr. Fozzard threw his head back again.

"Ah, yes, of course; and it would have been a pride to me to settle it so; if—a—there had really been any engagement." Which was said with the blank stare of some unfortunate, who, in proceeding full dress to a charming party, suddenly plumps his foot in the gutter.

"No engagement! Then how about the donkey ride?"

"Oh, the donkey ride. Ah, a very narrow escape, and very fortunate that I happened to be there. Miss Pennylopy was much excited, and you are aware, Mr.—a—Cheek, that under such circumstances, a man who—I say it without the slightest feeling of self-glorification, for we can claim no merit from natural advantages—a man who has the power of poetical language, may express himself more strongly than the less gifted. Probably I may

have done so ; but I have a perfect recollection that nothing was said of engagements."

This was very dignified, but very like the bravura of that fine bird the Booby, on the tree-top, under fascination of the snake at the foot of it ; for, lofty as he was, Mr. Fozzard was sensible from a sparkle through Cheek's squeezed-up eyelids, that down he must go.

"Come," replied the ambassador, with a comical change of tone and crinkles, "this great advantage of poetical language may do for people who have not cut their eye teeth, but it won't do for you and me. Miss Lopy and no settlements would not have been a bad spec; but Miss Lopy with sole and separate use, is no go. Mind what you are about, Fozzy, and secure a friend whilst you can. Pennylopy takes you for a man of fortune, and I take you for a man who means to make one. But you can't start without capital ; and fifteen thousand, settled sole and separate, is nothing at all. Your business is to get hold of it absolutely."

Mr. Fozzard was not so obtuse as we began by thinking him, though sufficiently so when he attempted the man of consequence ; but in the lower walk of worldly affairs he was not to be despised ; so, seeing Cheek was not to be outwitted, he did not contradict him.

"That being the case," resumed the conscientious envoy, "I will engage to further your views on condition that you lend a light to mine. Are you prepared to do that ?"

"That's what I call business, Mr. Cheek."

“Very well, then. On that condition you shall only have to tumble down upon your marrow-bones again, and perform the highly difficult task of making a fool of yourself; for which you shall be paid fifteen thousand pounds in hard cash. I have now to tell you *your* part in this compact, for without a steady performance of that, you must of course be prepared to find all I am going to do for you is to do you up. That’s business, you know—a word from me and good-bye to Jerusalem. You have been taking notes amongst the tenants, and collecting village scandal, and doing me a great deal of mischief by sending it all off to Captain Cox.”

Mr. Fozzard began to stammer.

“Oh, never mind. All in the way of business. I have mine, as well as you, which is fair on both sides. He has bought up the debts against the Broome Warren estate upon your showing of its value, and what I want to know distinctly, is the object of this?”

Mr. Fozzard was quick to find how rapid is the course of roguery. His imposition upon Miss Pen was only to be managed by treachery to Captain Cox, and his large white face looked very much like a lighted turnip.

“As I hope to be saved, Mr. Cheek, he never mentioned any object but a good investment.”

“Very likely; but what do you suppose?”

“My dear friend, what *can* I suppose?”

“Why, you can suppose that, if we don’t deal above board, I shall go back to Pennylopy.”

Mr. Fozzard was naturally of a timid disposition, and Mr. Cheek was a bully, which gave him an immense advantage. The expression with which he insinuated his menace was a great help to the slow imagination.

“Upon my word, I can’t—a—say it has ever gone so far as a supposition, but an idea, I believe, has—a—sometimes crossed my mind that Captain Cox *may* have thought of a purchase.”

“Speak out, Fozzy. I am not likely to tell him, because it does not suit me. He has told you so all along?”

“Well, I don’t like to betray confidence; but, as it is only between ourselves, I don’t see that it can do much harm.”

“Out with it.”

“Well, between ourselves, he has.”

“I thought so. And then, when the purchase is made, I am to be turned out of the agency?”

“Really, I—ha—there’s no saying. He may think that a better agent is not to be found.”

“Come, come; I know what sort of an agent you have described me. No offence amongst men of the world. If I had wanted to turn *you* out, I should not have said much good of you. You know well enough that I am to be turned out?”

“Well,” said the hard-pressed philosopher, seeing there was no evasion, and with his turnip face pretty well varnished with its tepid exhalations, “there certainly was some mention of it.”

“Man alive, don’t be delicate about it. It is only business. Don’t I tell you I must go and blow you

up with Miss Lopy, and cut you out of fifteen thousand pounds, unless you speak out! I am to be turned out, you say; and now who's to be put in my place? Out with it! You, of course, you."

Neddy was a man of slow motions, and always confused when he was hurried; and so he answered with a yes and a no; and then with a no and a yes.

"Which means yes. He is to turn me out and put you in my place?"

"In strict confidence, yes."

"So! we are getting on now. And why does he want to buy Broome Warren?"

"That is impossible to say."

"Oh, no; it is very possible. Quite as possible as the fact that when Mrs. Bloomer went to London he learnt her intention from you, and wrote in consequence to Miss Longland. Now can you make out why he wants the estate? Is it not as a temptation to her to become Mrs. Cox; and doesn't he want Mrs. Cox to secure his claim to something better?"

Alas for Edward; if Pen could only have seen him so *chiffonné*. There was no escape, and no resource but to reconcile his treason to his conscience by deciding that these questions could not go so near the truth without previous information. This made matters more easy, and he wiped his face and tried to make it cheerful.

"Ho, ho! Well, you've got it at last. I wouldn't betray secrets, but as you have them without my assistance—yes."

"That's the way, Fozzy. Be frank and be friends.

He's determined to have her, is he ? Well, we shall see. Now there's one thing more. You must let me know everything he does, and as soon as he does it, and as soon as he thinks of doing it; and the first thing must be an application to Chancery for the immediate sale. I look to you to settle this, and I give you one month. If the order is not out, and the day fixed by that time, depend upon it your personal estate will not fetch fifteen thousand pounds."

It was not easy to understand the motive for this condition ; for the sale of the property appeared to be the last thing that Cheek could desire.

" You don't understand it, don't you ? There's no need why you should. It suits my plans that the application to Chancery should be made by Cox. Nobody can make it but a creditor, and he is the only one."

" Then make yourself easy on that point, for it suits both parties, and has been his intention for some time."

" Take care he puts it in execution in no time, and take care he doesn't know he is playing my game —take care of that, for I mean to have no wedding before the sale ; and, if anything goes wrong, you may make up your mind that I mean to have none after it. All in the way of business, and not the less friends ; but ruin you I must, and ruin you by — I will !"

It was rather strong language between friends ; but being spoken with Mr. Cheek's peculiar ex-

pression of humour, it did duty for an excellent joke, which they both seemed to enjoy very much, and were beginning to be first-rate company, when Miss Pen's butler, Mr. Sprat, was heard to rush into the shop with a breathless enquiry of when Mr. Cheek was going back.

“Tell him he must come directly, for missis is took bad!”

“Laws!” cried the prentice-boy; “what ails her?”

“Mad staggers, or some such thing! Just for all the world as if she'd been a-eating of green gooseberries!”

“Don't say so! Here's a bottle of salvolatile—teaspoonful in a glass o' water! Fermentation—smart hand-rubbing—part affected!”

“I know, I know. Had it myself a—many times.”

“Few peppermint drops—warm her hinside—nothin' like 'em.”

“I know,” replied the messenger, cramming half-a-dozen into his own mouth, and clattering up-stairs with his terrible tidings.

“Missis is a-dying!” he cried, “and says she can't last, nohow at all, till your worship goes back.”

“Go along, you noisy little varlet, and tell her I'm busy!”

“Oh yes, I dessay! and get your worship's blowing up! I get enough on my own account for all that! What's the use of my saying you're busy, when she's a-kicking in fits.”

“Confound the rabid old Jewess!” exclaimed the

envoy, I must go and hold her down. Run, and say I'm coming!"

"Yessir. Make haste, or you'll be too late!" And away he scampered.

Like the bubble blown-up by the straw, Mr. Cheek swelled into the bigger bully, even for the puffing of Mr. Sprat, for it was another puff to his consequence.

"You see, Fozzard," he said, in a dignified peroration to the sitting, "I have not boasted of more than I can perform, and you may understand from that my determination to act strictly as a man of honour, either to make your fortune or send you to the devil—according to your behaviour. Come to me to-night, with all the notes you have made for Cox, and all the letters you have received from him; and don't forget a word you have heard from the farmers, that I may consider what sort of example to make of them. You shall then hear something more of Pennylopy. But remember, in the meantime, that you are not to leave Broome Warren for a single day without my permission, and that I shall expect you to report yourself every evening at toddy-time."

Poor Neddy protested roundly that he would stick as closely as Cheek himself to the point of honour, and very much resembled a great bulbous schoolboy who has become fag to a sharp fifth-former, and puts a cheerful face upon it, for fear of a pommelling. Cheek then pulled up his trousers, and picked his way down the cranky, three-cornered stairs, and prowled towards the cottage—moralising as he

went upon the great treachery of Fozzard, and manufacturing the iniquities of the only man he could trust. But as the numerous irons in his forge were not, at this time, sufficiently heated to be hammered into shape for their place in this history, we must leave him to blow his bellows, whilst we return to better company.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







